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## Good Mourning: Structured Feelings and Queering the Affective Potential of Grief

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**Abstract:**

By adopting affect as a method of study, this project elucidates the structured feelings of grief to show the affective potential that comes from experiencing a death or loss. I assert that structured feelings are an epistemological process that model and reproduce how certain affective states *ought* to be observed in Western culture. In the first chapter of this project, I use psychological readings to trace two kinds of grief, *good grief* and *queer grief*, to show how a grief that conforms to structured feelings should be observed as well as how certain expressions of grief can escape and threaten those structured feelings. Then turning to the social movements spawned by the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) and Black Lives Matter, I examine how the concept of queer grief and can be agentively mobilized to refuse the terms of a death or loss on the terms of systemic and institutionalized homophobic and racist policies and practices. In the conclusion of this project, I turn the critical lens onto myself to performatively explore the effects and affects of writing this thesis to show how and why scholars should be attendant to their own entanglements with their work.

Keywords: ACT UP, Affect, Black Lives Matter, Grief, Queer

GOOD MOURNING:  
STRUCTURED FEELINGS AND QUEERING THE AFFECTIVE POTENTIAL OF GRIEF

By

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B.A. Georgia Gwinnett College, 2015

THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts in Communication & Rhetorical Studies

Syracuse University  
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## Introduction: Structured Feelings: Affect, Society, and Mourning

*CRISTINA: There's a club—The Dead Dads Club—and you can't be in it until you're in it. You can try to understand; you can sympathize, but until you feel that loss ... My dad died when I was nine. George, I'm really sorry you had to join the club.*

*GEORGE: I ... I don't know how to exist in a world where my dad doesn't.*

*CRISTINA: Yeah, that never really changes.*

*—Grey's Anatomy, "Six Days, Part 2"*

My father is dead. I am in the Dead Dads Club. My dad didn't die when I was nine; he died when I was twenty-one. It wasn't a heroic death, or one that was tragic and unsolved: He died in his sleep. Like George O'Malley, I didn't—and still somewhat don't—know “how to exist in a world where my dad doesn't” (Yaitanes), but for very different reasons. My father and I were distant my whole life, and his death was the same. Though that distance made our relationship strained at best and non-existent at present, that distance also provided me a way to move through the grief surrounding his death—or lack thereof. The distance gave me an affective buffer to complete tasks associated with mourning a death and to perform the (idealized) role of a mourner. Rather than closing that distance and learning how to live without my father, I want to interrogate and live in the uncertainty that is emblematic of grief and loss.

When a loved one dies, we observe and perform particular rituals and tasks—making funeral arrangements, notifying family, holding wakes/visitation/shiva/etc.—in an attempt to either make sense of the loss and/or (begin) to emotionally heal from the loss. Self-Help book author Allison Gilbert, however, highlights the incompleteness of the rituals surrounding mourning a loved one. During the time after the codified rituals have run their course, mourners often turn to self-help books to find some form of guidance or

ritualistic behavior meant to alleviate or mitigate some of the grief they're facing. Two such books mourners might turn to serve as the artifacts for the first chapter of this thesis; the first is *Passed and Present: Keeping Memories of Loved Ones Alive*, and the second is *Grief One Day at a Time: 365 Meditations to Help You Heal After Loss*. In *Passed and Present*, Gilbert writes, "When someone we love dies, we usually benefit from being passive recipients of support. Between the rituals of burial and the recitation of certain prayers, between the wakes and shiva calls, the bereaved, and those who console them, know their role and take their place. But consider the vacuum that happens later" (xxii). This vacuum has perplexed me since coming across the quote. Why is there a vacuum after those rituals and what does this vacuum mean for people who are grieving?

My aim for this thesis is to interrogate the norms and social mores surrounding grief and mourning to understand: How are people "supposed to" grieve; what happens when individuals do not grieve in the prescribed manner; and, how can violating the structure of grief spawn social movements? To answer these questions, I deploy affect as a method and offer the concepts of *queer grief*, *structured feelings*, and *rhetorical loss of personhood* to the field of rhetorical studies. Because affect refers to "an impingement or extrusion of a momentary or sometimes more sustained state of relation as well as the passage (and duration of passage) or forces or intensities" (Gregg and Seigworth 1), both of which exceed language, making them hard to pin down, it is the best method for tracing these concepts that violate the norms surrounding emotional comportment in a society. Structured feelings are one of the tools hegemonic ideologies, such as racism, homophobia, and misogyny, use to dictate what the norm is, and *queer grief* is the

impingement upon those norms.

Queer grief evolves in two ways for this project. In the first chapter, I trace how queer grief precludes individuals from being able to grieve, and in the second chapter, I trace how activists act with agency to refuse the loss on the terms of hegemonic social institutions. I broadly define *queer grief* as the pathologized affect that destabilizes and/or escapes the dominant conceptions of what grief *ought* to be and how it *ought* to be observed in society—the *structured feelings* of grief. This definition’s fulcrum rests on the ties of queer grief to queer lives and bodies: Due to queer individuals’ marginal positionality in society, they are often not allowed to grieve the losses of their loved ones (due to the lack of recognition of various forms of queer relationality) and/or their own lives/deaths are not allowed to be grieved. Thus, queer grief becomes a threat to the established order of society that sees some lives as unworthy of being grieved and that sees grief as an impediment to progress and productivity. This grief is inflected with a sense of shame that accompanies the de-legitimization of queerness and queer lives. Because queerness is seen as a threat to heterosexuality/normativity, there’s a “break in the connection” between normativity and queerness that pushes queerness and queer lives to the margins (Probyn 13).

Queer grief can be used agentively, however, for the purposes of unsettling the dominant norms of hegemony as queerness itself is often deployed. Like the activists of the gay liberation movement and the similar movements that spawned from it, queerness was used *intentionally* to unsettle norms and social mores, and it is my assertion that queer grief also can be deployed intentionally in social movements. In refusing to accept

a death or loss on the terms of institutionalized norms or societally enforced mores, activists deploy queer grief in order to destabilize those necropolitical power structures that have marked their lives as expendable and/or ungrievable. A lineage of the conventions of mourning is necessary to understand and address how queer grief breaks those conventions.

### **Historical Context of Mourning**

In the early eighteenth century, the customs and mores of mourning were instituted in Western Culture, but weren't strictly adhered to unless there was a royal/political death (Beverly). One royal death, however, changed how mourning was observed. With the 1861 death of Prince Albert of England, Queen Victoria famously went into mourning until her death in 1901, which made mourning a more rigorously observed institution within Victorian culture (Bedikian 40). The stringency with which Queen Victoria adhered to her mourning rituals set the parameters for the rest of the queendom. In the Victorian Era, "Mourning periods were regulated, mourning dress was dictated, and funeral and burial arrangements became more extravagant," which gave rise to what was known as the "Cult of Mourning" ("Death and Mourning in the Victorian Era"). Like the Cult of Domesticity/True Womanhood, the main members and targeted recruits of the Cult of Mourning were women, and the zeal with which members subscribed to the tenets of the Cult of Mourning was a signifier for wealth and social capital. According to James Curl, "The Victorians celebrated death as an individually meaningful event, with lavish funerals, expensive processions, and feast-like wakes. ... this pageant was just as much about status for the living as honoring the dead" (25). In a

report on how mourning was affected by the 1889 Johnstown, Pennsylvania, flood, the National Park Service writes, “In 1889 the people of Johnstown were following the Victorian era’s traditions according to local and economic influences.” Mourning in a highly regimented style was a transatlantic phenomenon that lasted until the Queen’s death.

The Cult of Mourning died out with the Queen in 1901. Sonia Bedikian writes of how quickly the mores of the Victorian Era were thrown out, commenting: “Ironically, she [Queen Victoria] did not have a black funeral. At Osborne House, on the Isle of Wight, where she died, her mortuary chamber was hung in crimson; her pall was in sumptuously embroidered white satin, and the funeral draperies were violet” (43). The incorporation of color was a stark contrast to the lackluster black that plagued the Victorian Era funerals. The “toned-down” Edwardian Era that followed the Victorian Era focused more on utilitarianism, especially as World War I drew closer (Jones). By distancing “dying from their physical world,” those living through the shift in rulers “also further distanced the philosophies surrounding the threat of death from their minds” and “followed the social development [and industrialization] of the country and the faded illusions and preoccupations of death” (United States National Park Service). As in the Victorian Era, women in the Edwardian Era were the marker of the changing societal norms, and “By 1913, widows wore crepe trimming only, and discontinued its wear after 6-8 months. The elaborate and stiff widow’s cap of the Victorian era had given way to the ‘graceful little Marie Stuart coif, with long ends at the back,’ and ladies also had the option of wearing a crepe-trimmed bonnet with heavy veiling” (Jones). This emphasis on

less complicated mourning dress marks the utilitarianism taking hold.

When the first World War hit, rationing to support the war effort affected the amount of materials available to create the elaborate graveside decorations and mourning garb. Women were also called upon to fill various jobs that were being created due to the war and those vacated by the men who left to be soldiers, and therefore couldn't seclude themselves away performing elaborate mourning rituals (Bedikian 47–48). National pride subsumed the resources and co-opted the affective habitus of grief held over from the Victorian Era. This shift away from grief snowballed as “Changes of the perception of embalming and cremation, science, new technology and inventions, industrial productivity, and commerce, the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918, two World Wars, severe economic depression, and the threats of world holocaust diminished mourning traditions and required people to look forward rather than languish in sorrow” (United States National Park Service).

In contemporary Western culture, some of these utilitarian approaches still hold, such as a resistance to extreme displays of grieving and a shorter window of mourning to keep up productivity. Rather than spending years transitioning through regimented phases of mourning, Edwardian mores gave a couple of weeks or months for mourners to display their grief, and the mourning garb became less intricate to allow for increased ability to work while wearing them (Bedikan 47-48). Eventually in “the 1930s, mourning ritual was largely abandoned” (Ibid. 50), and now, mourners are usually given less than a week of bereavement leave (Tahmincioglu), and rituals surrounding death are typically handled by religious institutions (explored in Chapter One). The National Park Service

concludes its report on the history of mourning customs by noting:

Death is now a “private” not a “public” matter. Today’s mourners are encouraged not to offend others by reminding them of their sorrow. The ritual of mourning is no longer part of modern life. Those who are grieving are treated affectionately but now a great burden is placed on them. There is discouragement from expressing grief and one must define one’s own ritual, guided by their own feelings and the unimplied [*sic*] presumptions of relatives and friends. There is now no symbolic way to show grief. Death is no longer part of our daily conscious thought.

By forcing the rituals surrounding mourning into people’s private lives, the public facets and institutions of everyday life could delineate how long mourning should last and how it should be resolved without actually having to help individuals through the emotional, affective side of grief. Mourning became seen as something that hindered progress and productivity, and should therefore be dealt with in private, on someone’s own time (explored in Chapter One). The strict guidelines surrounding grief and mourning gives it an affective potentiality to impinge upon the world and cause change. It is the main contention of this thesis that grief is an affect that comes with affective scripts and norms—structured feelings—that are formally and informally enforced by a variety of social institutions (e.g. medicine and psychiatry, workplace policies, religious practices, and the family). Going off-script or breaking the norms associated with grief, violating the structured feelings, unleashes affective potentialities to accomplish social change.

### **Affect and Structured Feelings**

Although Aristotle named the emotional appeal of *pathos* as a main tenet of rhetoric, affect theory’s advent and popularity (re)invigorated rhetoricians to pay closer

attention to the affective aspects of rhetoric. Affect might be defined as the “varied, surging capacities to affect and to be affected that give everyday life the quality of a continual motion of relations, scenes, contingencies, and emergences” (Stewart 1-2). The “varied” and “surging” nature causes affect to resist being named and “is thus best understood in terms of ‘potential’ or ‘not-yet-qualified intensities’” (Rand, “Gay Pride and Its Queer Discontents” 77). Kathleen Stewart links affect—or more specifically “ordinary affects”—to Raymond Williams’ structures of feeling in that (ordinary) affect(s) “do not have to await definition, classification, or rationalization before they exert palpable pressures” on various subjects (2). The significance of affect “lies in the intensities [it] build[s] and in what thoughts and feelings [it] make[s] possible” (Stewart 3).

With affect being the precursor of emotions, some affect scholars prefer to make a distinction between affect and emotions/feelings. Deborah Gould distinguishes affect from emotions/feelings by considering the “bodily, sensory, inarticulate, nonconscious experience” to be “affect” (*Moving Politics* 20). Gould further defines affect as “something that we do not quite have language for, something that we cannot fully grasp, something that escapes us but is nevertheless in play, generated through interaction with the world, and affecting our embodied beings and subsequent actions” (Ibid.). This interaction with the world is of specific interest to Lauren Berlant, who traces “affective activity that makes beings bound to the present rather than to futures” (12). This means rather than “equating the optimism of attachment with the feeling of optimism itself, and optimism with happiness, feeling good, and the optimism about optimism,” Berlant prizes the affective attachment of subjects to the present, which in her formulation keeps affect and



emotions/feelings separate because affect—especially the affect of cruel optimism—can lead to any number of feelings (12-13).

While the distinction between affect and emotions/feelings as precursor and effect is productive in discussing how single texts can elicit any number of emotions/feelings, some scholars prefer to discuss affect and emotions/feelings together. For the purposes of this project, I prefer to fall in line with Sara Ahmed and Juana Maria Rodríguez by not worrying over the distinction. Ahmed writes,

I think that the distinction between affect/emotion can under-describe the work of emotions, which *involve* forms of intensity, bodily orientation, and direction that are not simply about “subjective content” or qualification of intensity. Emotions are not “after-thoughts” but shape how bodies are moved by the worlds they inhabit ... While you can separate an affective response from an emotion that is attributed as such (the bodily sensations from the feeling of being afraid), this does not mean that in practice, or in everyday life, they are separate. In fact, they are contiguous; they slide into each other; they stick, and cohere, even when they are separated. (*The Promise of Happiness* 230–231)

Likewise, Rodríguez uses “*affect, feeling, and emotion*” (emphasis in original) in a way that “becomes entangled in imprecise ways” in order to “deploy[ ] affect as a critical methodology that provides access to what Foucault terms ‘subjugated knowledges’” (17). The ways in which Rodríguez celebrates the imprecise entanglement of affect, feeling, and emotion is of particular relevance to this project because the death of a person is usually experienced more than once. There’s the initial death, the notification of other family members/loved ones who (re)experience the loss with the informant, the funeral or wake, and so on, which means it has the ability to affect and *re*affect loved ones in different ways each time, thus entangling the affect of death and loss with the various

emotions and feelings that follow with each experience of the death. Each time someone (re)experiences a loss, they are (re)experiencing an impingement on their normalcy (Gregg and Seigworth).

### *Structured Feelings*

When there is a possibility for an affect to cause a memorable experience—an experience that has the capacity to alter the consciousness of an individual—society observes *structured feelings* that inculcate citizens with ways to handle these rogue affects. *Structured feelings* are an epistemological process through which a society understands and reproduces norms and mores of how citizens expected to experience and express (or not express) certain affective states (much in the same way Judith Butler conceptualizes gender norms as a way to both understand gender norms as well as a way to reproduce those norms). While “structured feelings” as a term conveys the regimentation of these affective states have been coerced into certain paths to follow, the term is also indebted to Raymond Williams’ *structure of feeling* and Sara Ahmed’s *feelings of structure*. In *Marxism and Literature*, Williams explains that structure of feeling “Methodologically . . . is a cultural hypothesis . . . derived from attempts to understand” how the “emergent or pre-emergent, they [what Williams calls *changes of presence*] do not have to await definition, classification, or rationalization before they exert palpable pressures and set effective limits on experience and on action” (132). These *changes of presence* are what begin the thought patterns that form hegemony and are referred to as “feeling” “to emphasize a distinction from more formal concepts of ‘world-view’ or ‘ideology’” (Ibid.). Like affect, structure of feeling is imbued with a potentiality of

becoming that adds a new plane or layer to the “palimpsest of force-encounters traversing the ebbs and swells of intensities that pass between ‘bodies’” (Gregg and Seigworth 2).

The affective properties of Williams’ theory leads Sara Ahmed to note that scholars “can and should follow ... ‘structures of feeling,’” and that “[her] suggestion here is that we might also want to explore ‘feelings of structure’” because to Ahmed “feelings might be how structures get under our skin” (*The Promise of Happiness* 216). In thinking about how structures get under people’s skin, Ahmed notes how “The desire to get over something” covers the potential of “those who have been undone by suffering [to be] the agents of ethical transformation” (Ibid.). When someone is “undone” by any affective experience, they will use their emotions to make sense of what has happened, of how certain structures have gotten under their skin. However, because society harbors a “desire to move beyond suffering in reconciliation,” people who persist in their negative feelings are marked as deviant and/or dangerous (Ibid.). In attempt to prevent the possibility of these affect aliens (Ahmed’s term for people who do not conform to expected affective state[s]), society prescribes *structured feelings* that focus on “the very will to ‘be over it’ by asking others to ‘get over’” whatever experience or event needs to be worked through and reconciled (Ibid.). This urge to “get over” negative feelings has led to the pathologization of certain affects, like grief. When someone is queerly grieving, they are refusing to “get over” the losses experienced are the focus of this thesis; in the first chapter, I posit a queer version of psychology’s complicated grief that breaks the structured feeling around grief by grieving those who aren’t supposed to be grieved, and

in the second chapter, I apply queer grief to ACT UP and Black Lives Matter to illustrate the affective and political potential of queer grief.

The efficacy of structured feelings comes from their ability to help bring affect into the realm of language and sense-making. Deborah Gould writes how “efforts to make sense of events and phenomena are never without feeling” (*Moving Politics* 13), thus whenever there is a massive event (e.g. a death or many deaths) the populations affected try to make sense of the affects that have been disturbed, generated, transmitted, and felt. Affect is nonlinguistic, unqualified, and unqualifiable “intensity” that hasn’t yet had “the sociolinguistic fixing of the quality of experience which is from that point onward defined as personal” (Massumi 28). Once an affect becomes linguistically qualified as an emotion, it is subjective and personal to the response of the person who received the affect; that is to say, a person’s own emotional history and the context in which they were affected help shape the ways in which they assign emotional language to the affect(s) they experience. When trying to make sense of what has occurred, individuals turn to their emotions since “emotion incites, shapes, and is generated by practices of meaning-making” (Gould 13). However, since various political and institutional leaders have the ability to model and tell individuals how to feel and interpret their feelings about an event, the meaning-making emotions provides are always already colored by how society at large has incited, shaped, and generated its own practices of making sense of the event. For instance, when the AIDS crisis was ravaging the queer community, Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush modeled an ignorance toward the crisis that structured feelings for most of the United

States to feel antipathy toward those being affected because they were thought to have brought the disease on themselves. Likewise, Marita Sturken charts how the national tragedies of the Oklahoma City Bombing and the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks on the World Trade Center spurred a certain kind of consumer culture that prevented fearfulness by helping Americans distance themselves from the tragedies through kitschy comfort items like teddy bears and taught Americans to prize security and nationalism through buying American-made items that afforded peace of mind like Hummer SUVs. By regimenting the affect of feeling attacked, vulnerable, and fearful, the American government was able to instead create feelings of nationalism and xenophobia.

The scripts of structured feelings use regimentation to foreclose the potentiality of an affect because it forces individuals to focus on completing tasks and/or steps. In tracing the task-related nature of “happiness,” Sara Ahmed writes that happiness has become associated with “living the good life,” which entails accumulating markers of happiness, what she calls happy objects. Happy objects such as the family, normalcy, and marriage become goals individuals must achieve to be “happy,” thus equating the feeling of happiness with accumulating social and financial capital. This amassing of wealth limits the affective potential of “happiness” through regimenting how someone *becomes* happy. Likewise, the affective potential of grief to disorder and disrupt a person’s life is limited through the structured feelings of mourning in contemporary society, which has marked mourning and grief as a “private” emotion. Individuals have learned and generated ways of making sense of and/or feeling grief that begins with death or loss and has an end goal of “feeling better” or having “moved on.” There have been different

versions of structured grief that teach individuals *how* to grieve, the most notable of which is the Kübler-Ross model or the five stages<sup>1</sup> of grieving (Kübler-Ross), but all models hinge on a griever being “better” once they have accepted the loss (Bonanno and Kaltman; See Chapter One for a deeper analysis of various grief models). Once a person has privately worked through the structured feeling of grief they can conform to the standards of comportment as outlined by the society they live in. By constructing and instructing the ways in which individuals experience affective states, structured feelings are a tool for hegemonic social institutions (like government, law enforcement, etc.) to control the unpredictability and potentiality of affect, especially as it relates to meaning-making.

### *Pathologized Affects*

Many times, affects are pathologized because they are seen as threatening, detrimental, and/or abnormal to and in societies. Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites note that “modern civic order is based on muted affect—that is, on the containment of emotionality, and especially negative emotions, to private life” because “emotional display[s] can become a mode of dissent” (6). Although modern society has taken steps to separate itself from disorder and calamity, prizing rationality and “muted” or flat affective states, some affects escape the confines of decorum and give a “sense that something is defective or misaligned, [a] feeling that something has gone off the

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<sup>1</sup> Elisabeth Kübler-Ross’ stages are as follows: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. It’s interesting to note that these stages of grief were initially used to help people who were dying to cope with the impending loss of their life rather than to help those surviving the deceased move through their loss.

rails in a discernible way” (Rice 35). Jenny Rice focuses on pathology, which she (re)imagines as not just “the broken connections between people—which has been the dominant story of pathology and sensation within our field” but that “the experience of pathology also reminds us that rhetoric’s sensorium is working—*really working*” (35, emphasis in original). These affects that mark the broken connections and contain the potentiality for dissent come with pathologies or symptoms that are marked and/or perceived as abnormal, and therefore a threat, to the society in which they are occurring. Rice views affective rhetoric as a method for pointing out when something has failed, but she also reveals the flipside of the failure as something that social hegemony has already dog-eared as being broken. Through attempting to fix the broken connections, Rice asserts that certain ideologies use prescriptive language that tells individuals how they “*ought*” to feel in order to remedy the perceived affective ailment (37-38). For instance, misogyny tells women they *ought* to be demure and submissive rather than powerful and equal to men. These pathologies are earmarked when there is a threat for dissent from the instituted norms—e.g. when the feminist movement first began, they were pathologized as masculinized man-haters. The specific pathologies of interest in this thesis are those associated with grief. By examining the institutions (like workplace policy and psychological studies) and pop psychology (like self-help books) that create a narrative surrounding what grief *ought* to be, I locate what I call *queer grief* that is able to be (re)deployed to affect political change.

Borrowing from the medical field, the pathologization of affect is the method of distinguishing (or diagnosing) and remedying (or treating) the perceived malady

associated with certain affective states and/or expressions. As with treating viral diseases, treatments usually focus on the symptoms rather than the underlying issues. For instance, when someone goes to the doctor for what turns out to be a common cold, they are prescribed rest, fluids, and over-the-counter drugs that aid in the treatment of symptoms, such as aspirin for the fever, nasal strips or spray for blocked sinuses, etc. They are not treated for the underlying issue of the rhinovirus that has made its way into the person's system because there is no cure for viral infections. The same is true for pathologized affects. Since pathologized affects arise from the broken connections between people and typically center on a difference of ideology, the symptoms that arise are often emotions and feelings of dis(-)ease. *Pathologized affects* are the loci of social unrest that have the potential to unsettle the dominant ideologies of a culture.

As is explored further in Chapter Two, social movements like the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) and Black Lives Matter often mobilize queer grief to help destabilize the homophobia and racism surrounding ineffective handling of the HIV/AIDS crisis and extrajudicial killings of Black Americans. When these social movements arise, those in power, such as presidents or agency directors, often try to appease those protesting by offering miniscule changes—for ACT UP it was purported advances in HIV/AIDS research and treatments and for Black Lives Matter it is the superficial investigations into the police officers that kill and oppress Black individuals. The affects being felt by the oppressed—whether that be anger, shame, and/or grief—are therefore pathologized so that they may be remedied and quarantined as to not infect the larger populace, further disrupting the status quo.



### *Pathology and Queerness*

Since this thesis revolves around the affect of queer grief, it is important to understand the relationship of queerness as a theoretical lens to the study of affects. Claiming a queer lens goes beyond looking at, examining, and/or questioning the identity categories on the LGBTQIA+ spectrum, and like José Esteban Muñoz, I see queerness as “an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world” (*Cruising Utopia* 1). “Queer” isn’t something someone can possess in this imagining of queerness—it’s not a quality someone can have; instead, queerness is a gesture toward something else, something different. By focusing on the potential of queerness, I also align myself with Erin J. Rand’s “de-essentialized notion of queerness that disconnects ‘queer’ from any particular referent, and instead refigures it as the undecidability from which rhetorical agency is actualized” (“An Inflammatory Fag and a Queer Form” 298–299). By (re)conceptualizing queerness as not necessarily being solely about queer bodies, lives, and identities but instead tied to the undecidable potentiality that is informed by queer bodies, lives, and identities, critics can account for the agency that is imbued in being able to unsettle hegemony. With this definition of queerness, I theorize *queer grief* as an affect that is closely tied to the lives and bodies of queer individuals that threatens to destabilize the structured feelings of what grief *ought* to be.

This emphasis on potentiality or possibility for queerness to unsettle hegemonic forces lends queerness to the study of affect, especially pathologized affect since queerness has long been pathologized in Western cultures (e.g. homosexuality being a

mental disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders [DSM] until 1973 and/or trans\* individuals being classified as having “gender dysphoria” in the current DSM). Rodríguez writes, affect “is not about individual self-contained emotions, but rather how feelings function in the realm of the social” (17), which speaks to Ahmed’s insistence that “[t]o read affect we [critics] need better understandings of this ‘in place,’ and how the ‘in place’ involves psychic and social dimensions, which means that the ‘in place’ is not always in the same place” (*The Promise of Happiness* 230–231). From a rhetorical studies prospective, this understanding of “in place” can be corollary to “context”; thus, when understanding queerness and the associated affects as a destabilizing threat to social order, critics must attend to the historical and physical context of their objects of study to fully and/or better understand the potentiality of queerness and affect. This thesis works to uncover how queer grief destabilizes the structured feelings of grief as well as to uncover how queer grief’s queer affective potential can be harnessed for activist means, which entails using affect as a method.

### **Affect as Methodology**

Despite affect’s slippery, elusive nature, I posit that there are ways the theory can be deployed as a method. Roland Barthes, who was writing before affect theory became widely adopted, offers two methodologies that are highly similar to affect: “the third meaning” and “punctum” in *Image-Music-Text* and *Camera Lucida*, respectively.<sup>2</sup> In

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<sup>2</sup> Special thanks to Rachel Hall for pointing out the similarities between the third meaning, *punctum*, and affect in our Visual Culture seminar.

*Image-Music-Text*, Barthes traces three meanings that can arise from artifacts: the first is the informational or denotative meaning, what is literally in the artifact; the second is the symbolic or connotative meaning, what is the artifact referencing; and the third meaning is the filmic meaning, what is indescribable of the artifact. Barthes defines the third meaning as follows:

I read, I receive (and probably even first and foremost) a third meaning—evident, erratic, obstinate. I do not know what its signified is, at least I am unable to give it a name, but I can see clearly the traits, the signifying accidents of which this—consequently incomplete—sign is composed. ... On the one hand, it cannot be conflated with the simple *existence* of the scene, it exceeds the copy of the referential motif, it compels an interrogative reading ... on the other, neither can it be conflated with the dramatic meaning of the episode. (“The Third Meaning” 53)

This third meaning is what exceeds the artifact, what cannot quite be placed. This third meaning can be understood in the same excess that is characteristic of affect. Like the third meaning, affect exceeds the dialectic relationship between connotation and denotation, between informational and symbolic. Affect is *felt, embodied, sensate*.

Building off the third meaning, Barthes offers *punctum*, which is felt like affect. *Punctum* is a way to discern affective facets of photographic texts and is of importance to the partial grief archive I assemble for ACT UP and Black Lives Matter in Chapter Two. The *punctum* of an artifact is like a “sting, peck, cut, little hole—and also a cast of the dice ... *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)” (*Camera Lucida* 27). The *punctum* is something that exceeds the artifact, or is extraordinary while the *studium* of an artifact covers the first and second meanings of the artifact—the connotation and denotation, the informational and the symbolic.

Barthes writes, the “*studium*, which doesn't mean, at least not immediately, ‘study,’ but application to a thing, taste for someone, a kind of general, enthusiastic commitment, of course, without special acuity” (Ibid.). In terms of rhetorical criticism, the *studium* of an artifact is the quantifiable qualities—e.g. genre, context, structure, etc.—criticism often initially analyzes, whereas the *punctum* is what exceeds qualification, it is a person's investment in an artifact, a tug that keeps an artifact in the back of someone's mind, a heat that seizes a body, a rush, a tingle. The *punctum* of an artifact yields its third meaning; it is how an artifact has the ability to affect those who encounter it. Barthes points out “It is not possible to posit a rule of connection between the *studium* and the *punctum* (when it happens to be there). It is a matter of co-presence” (*Camera Lucida* 42). In other words, affect is not always present in an artifact, but when it is there, it does not override the *studium* of the artifact, rather they exist together, relationally.

How is the critic to *read* for affect, though? Deploying affect as a method relies on reflexivity and close textual analysis. Before a critic can uncover “the real powers of affect, affect as potential: a body's capacity to affect and to be affected” and determine how an artifact can affect (Gregg and Seigworth 2), they must first determine how they themselves are affected by the artifact. A recent turn in rhetorical studies has yielded an uptake in critically reflexive scholarship. In 1994, Robert L. Ivie advocates for the practice of scrutinizing rhetorical criticism because it reminds scholars “of the reflexivity of critical practice, i.e., that critics deliberately construct knowledge of rhetorical practice; they design the discernable to achieve certain objectives” (2); the next year, Thomas K. Nakayama and Robert L. Krizek use quotes of self-reflection throughout their

article to demonstrate how reflexivity can influence approaches to certain artifacts. Later, Charles E. Morris III, echoing Ivie and citing Nakayama and Krizek, argues for the “reinvigorat[ion of] what was a charge of the 1990s, that of self-reflection, [of] what [he] think[s] of artfully and rhetorically as *critical self-portraiture*” (“(Self-)Portrait of Prof. R.C.” 32). To show the impact of a *lack* of critical reflexivity, Celeste M. Condit re-reads Edwin Black’s canonical “The Second Persona” to repair Black’s mis-characterizations of Robert Welch’s *Blue Book*. This turn to critical reflexivity is especially important to the intersection of affect and rhetorical studies for two reasons. First, as (affect) scholars, we must be conscious of *how* our artifacts affect *us* so that we can begin to analyze how those artifacts are received by their audiences. Second, as (affect) scholars, we must be attendant to what Condit terms our “affiliative feelings” when analyzing our artifacts in order to be cognizant of how our own attachments and affiliations influence how an artifact might prick us or pique our interests.<sup>3</sup>

Understanding our own biases toward and/or against our artifacts allows us to be more generous to our artifacts and their rhetorical significance. After understanding how our own bodies as rhetorical scholars are affected by our artifacts, we can begin to analyze how the body of an(other) audience member “come[s] to shift its affections (its being-affected) into action (capacity to affect)” (Gregg and Seigworth 2).

Affect as a method entails using close textual analysis for “being-affected” and “capacity to affect.” When looking for instances of being-affected, the artifact often

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<sup>3</sup> It is interesting to note that “pique” comes from the Middle French *piquer* which means “to stimulate” as well as “to prick”; further, *piquer* is comparable to the Spanish *picar* which also shares the dual meaning of “to stimulate” as well as “to prick” (“Pique, v.2”).

reveals how the creator was affected while creating the artifact. If the artifact is written, critics can look to words that express emotion or feelings—e.g. happy, sad—but also words that point to what is escaping language—e.g. when discussing the attraction of ACT UP, David Robinson says, “But—I didn’t—*something about it clearly attracted me*, even though I was—I don’t even think I chanted. But *the energy definitely got me* to at least go to the meeting” (17, emphases added). This context will help to illuminate the creator’s affective orientations to their work, which can signal how the audience(s) of the artifact *can* be affected.

Conversely, when close reading for “capacity to affect,” we can look to the same context of the emotions and/or indescribable sensations to see how the creator wants the audience(s) to be affected. In other words, close reading for the capacity to affect means finding the implied auditor of the artifact, or the second persona. In “The Second Persona,” Edwin Black describes the second persona as the audience that a text hails and constitutes through its address. For instance, when news coverage of Trayvon Martin’s murder called the unarmed teenager a “thug” or “hoodlum” (See: Coates; Hill; MSNBC),<sup>4</sup> the disparaging comments show the writer(s) of the article(s) being-affected by the event; and further, the writer(s) are also implying an auditor of the article that either already did or would come to feel the same resentment and malice toward Martin. By looking for the third meaning that pricks both the creator and the audience, using affect

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<sup>4</sup> I would like to note that Coates and Hill do not refer to Martin as a thug or hoodlum themselves, rather they reiterate those pejoratives in their telling of the case and media attention surrounding it. I have directed readers to these two sources since I am committed to using artifacts generated by those associated with and/or sympathetic to the Black Lives Matter movement. The MSNBC article, though, is an example of a disparaging article that attempts to influence the sentiments of its readers.

as a methodology reveals how our affective orientations are always in flux—affecting and being affected—and have the ability to be rhetorically acted upon, changing our affections into actions.

### **Artifacts and Chapter Overview**

The artifacts of this thesis begin to constitute a modest grief archive that explores the affections toward and actions from grief. From pop psychology self-help books to peer-reviewed therapeutic approaches to grief, the first chapter works to explore the being-affected-ness of grieving to reveal a pathologized *queer grief* that disrupts the structured feelings surrounding the grieving process. The second chapter draws from the established archives devoted to the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) and attempts to begin an archive for the Black Lives Matter movement to show the possibilities of movements animated by queer grief. These discrete groupings of artifacts work to show the twofold potentiality of affect: the ability to affect and be affected, in this case, by queer grief.

My own rhetorical construction of this fledgling grief archive is unsurprisingly inflected by my own commitments to and affiliations with (queer) grief. While death and loss are an omnipresent reality of human life, I've often felt a queer or different orientation to loss and especially grief. I've been overly affected by certain losses and completely disaffected by others, and it is these opposing sentiments (or lack thereof) I use as my point of entry into the ongoing conversation about affect. The artifacts of these chapters work to show the potentiality of what grief currently is as well as what grief

*could be.*

*Psychology, Pop and Otherwise: Chapter One*

Focusing on what grief currently is, Chapter One, “A Taxonomy of Grief,” analyzes the structured feelings surrounding grief to reveal the possibility of a grief that violates that structure. Mourning and grief and their associated structuring have changed throughout history, becoming more compliant to the needs of the society at the given time. Using psychology articles on diagnosing and treating abnormal grief to survey the conversation of contemporary grief, Chapter One focuses on the contemporary iteration of *good grief*, which is a grief that quickly resolves itself and conforms to the structured feelings of grief, as well as the notion of *queer grief*, the pathologized version of grief that escapes what grief *ought* to be. I discern what is marked as pathological while grieving, how society attempts to prevent this pathological grief, and how instances of pathological grief are remedied in pop psychology self-help books. The articles are closely read for “being affected,” looking for how the therapist-scholars are affiliated to the artifact of grief and how they describe what grief itself should. Once the characteristics of queer grief are clear, I turn to reading the self-help books for the “capacity to affect” with a focus on what kind of reader the books are hoping to constitute. Ultimately, this chapter aims to uncover how capitalist societies pathologize certain forms of grief that are seen as detrimental to the “Western myth” of progress. This queer grief violates the structured feelings established by society through refusing to accept a death or loss on the terms of outlined by the structured feelings. This



pathologization leads to a society that is ultimately death-adverse and sees certain individuals as expendable.

*ACT UP and Black Lives Matter: Chapter Two*

Expendability ties together the artifacts of Chapter Two, “Deploying Queer Grief: ACT UP and Black Lives Matter.” However, the artifacts that constitute partial grief archives for ACT UP and Black Lives Matter are assembled using different methods. ACT UP’s salience during the AIDS crisis in America has generated multiple archives dedicated to the organization and its accomplishments. I draw from three main archives to gather the artifacts used in the chapter. First is the ACT UP Oral History Project, begun by Sarah Schulman and Jim Hubbard, that “reveal[s] what has motivated [members of ACT UP] to action and how they have organized complex endeavors” (“About”). These interviews allowed me to find the affective investments of the group as they fought AIDS-based discrimination through various demonstrations; the demonstrations that yielded the largest social change and/or were described in the most sensational terms were pulled from the interviews to help guide the rest of the artifact collection. Although many consider the organization to be dead, ACT UP’s original chapter in New York still considers itself active and has a website featuring its own document archive—which includes various news articles, guiding documents of the group, and more (“ACT UP New York”). I pulled what relates to the affiliative feelings members recall in their interviews and supplement any gaps still left with the ACT UP

collection in the New York Public Library Archives Digital Collections. Together, the artifacts from these archives constitute a portion of ACT UP's grief archive.

Building an archive of grief for Black Lives Matter presents an interesting but imperative challenge: How do I begin to create an archive for something that is still growing, molding, moving, affecting? In *Performance*, Diana Taylor revisits her earlier work on the archive and the repertoire, reminding readers that the repertoire is made up of “embodied acts—performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing—acts usually thought of as ephemeral, non-reproducible knowledge,” whereas the archive holds more “traditional ... objects—books, documents, bones, DVDs—that theoretically resist change over time” (188–189). At the time of this project, Black Lives Matter is still happening; its moments of activism are not yet seen in hindsight, unchanging. However, the *bodies* of the victims of extrajudicial murder are very much a part of the Black Lives Matter archive; the news coverage of the killings, the protests, the new killings and assaults are very much a part of the Black Lives Matter archive. Ann Cvetkovich notes that cultural artifacts are hard to archive “because they are lived experience, and the cultural traces that they leave are frequently inadequate to the task of documentation” (9). How is an (unchanging) archive supposed to account for an organization that is still imbued with (and re-energized by) the potentiality of affect? I believe the answer comes from the reflexivity that affect as a method requires: I notice how I am pricked by the artifacts generated by Black Lives Matter and how I am moved to action by these artifacts. The artifacts that prick me the most, that move me to action (whatever action that might be) are the artifacts that are chosen to begin this grief archive.

With the grief archives assembled, I interrogate these organizations, their actions, advances, and pitfalls through the lens of queer grief to uncover the political potentiality of refusing to accept deaths/losses on the terms of the hegemonic forces that mark certain lives as ungreivable. At the core of these organizations lies the rhetorical loss of personhood and an insistence on grieving their losses even though the necropolitical power structures (guided by homo-antagonism and racism) view the deaths as ungreivable. I define a rhetorical loss of personhood is the loss of a quality conferred to an individual by the society in which they live that allows them to act agentively and democratically in any given situation. When a person is seen as disposable, their capacity to affect change is (seemingly) lost. If the larger society a person lives in sees them as disposable, expendable, interchangeable, then the society can very easily look away from that person. The community becomes unaffected by that person. By analyzing the two organizations of ACT UP and Black Lives Matter, I show how queer grief is an agentive affect that allows individuals, groups, and populations to refuse the terms of which the loss occurred; queer grief supplies the potentiality for change.

### *Affected by Writing: Conclusion*

The Conclusion, “Grieving Writing,” I exercise the reflexivity called for when deploying affect as a method and turn the critical reflexivity onto myself. In exploring the psychic and physical toll of writing about the “negative” e/affect of grief, of surrounding myself with artifacts laden with death, anger, sadness, and shame. Framed as a mystory (Bowman and Bowman; Bowman), this chapter will be framed “as a

dynamic response to the extent to which writing and performance have failed each other by withdrawing—whether defensively or by pejorative attribution—into identification with either arcane or apparently self-evident means of knowledge production” to bridge the gap between these two analytics (writing and performance) (Pollack 79). I am putting these two analytics against one another in order to convey a fuller understanding of the potential to *affect* and be *affected by* affect (theory).

Affect, as will be further explored throughout the rest of this thesis, operates as an animating force that allows individuals to act and be acted upon. While the Conclusion focuses on how I was moved to (in)action in different moments of grief, the rest of the thesis operates as an exploration of how grief affects those who experience it. Overall, it is my intention to show how certain ways of being affected and affecting are shaped through a processual reproduction of structured feelings shaped by hegemonic forces—whether they be institutionalized policies and practices or rampant homophobia and racism (or both). Through centering affect and queerness in this thesis, I show the saliency and implications of attending to how rhetorical (in)actions shaped the way individuals experience and are animated by grief—an experience that can either be good or queer.

## Chapter One: A Taxonomy of Grief: The Good and the Queer

“Good Grief” is one of the catchphrases of the wistful Charlie Brown, but what qualifies as *good* grief? Grief is the affective state that follows “*bereavement*, comprising thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and physiological changes that vary in pattern and intensity over time” (Shear 461, emphasis in original). While individuals are grieving, they encounter, feel, and express various emotions like sadness, anger, denial, and more; but, there is a “socially constituted, prevailing way[ ] of feeling and emoting, as well as the embodied, axiomatic understandings and norms about feelings and their expression” that presents a general guideline to grieving (Gould, *Moving Politics* 10). This emotional habitus of grieving is dictated by the mores and norms established by the society an individual belongs to. For instance, the Introduction to this thesis partially explored the norms surrounding grief and mourning in Victorian England, which were adopted in solidarity with/imitation of the queen who indefinitely mourned the loss of her husband and performed elaborate rituals of marking herself in all-black garb and secluding herself (Curl; Bedikian). Thus, in the Victorian Era, the emotional habitus of grieving created by the queen entailed visibly marking and secluding oneself for an extended period in order to conform to what had become seen as the proper or correct way to grieve a loss and to restore the “capacity ... for joy and satisfaction” (Shear 461). The current emotional habitus of grieving in Western culture is more understated and focused on the end goal rather than on the process of grieving itself.

For there to be a *good* or *normal* grief distinction, there must also be a *bad*, or what I’m terming *queer grief*, which is the grieving process some individuals go through

that is marked as pathological and/or abnormal. Queer grief violates the structured feelings of grief aimed at preserving the norms of society. As outlined in the Introduction, *structured feelings* are an epistemological tool through which a society teaches and models to its members how they are expected to experience and express (or not express) certain affective states. These structured feelings typically use what Jenny Rice terms “prescriptive language,” which hinges on the word *ought*: The way individuals *ought* to act is delivered through structured feelings that focus on a regimented or task-oriented models of emotion/feelings. Structured feelings, therefore, predetermine how individuals will react to certain events and phenomena. When someone is told how they *ought* to act or feel, it marks how they *are* acting/feeling as deviant or pathological; how they *are* acting/feeling is how they *ought not* act/feel. By outlining how people *ought* to grieve, structured feelings of grief also produce the notion of *queer grief*, which is the pathologized version of grief that destabilizes or escapes what a mourner’s life *ought* to be in a way that removes them from what society has deemed “normal.” When encouraging constituents to “move on” from the Benghazi attack (Schleifer), Hillary Clinton was prescribing how Americans *ought* to feel about the deaths caused by that incident, four of which were Americans. Those deaths were to be no longer grieved—if they were to be grieved in the first place—but Dorothy Woods, the widow of one of the Navy SEALs killed in the attack, became marked as a queer griever who felt Clinton “has no right ... to tell [Woods] it’s time to move on” (Ibid.). Therefore, *queer grief* works to unsettle and destabilize the homogenizing views of how people are meant to mourn.

This chapter unfolds as a taxonomy of two griefs, the *straight*-laced good grief

that conforms to societal norms and the rebellious queer grief that undermines the normativizing power of social norms. In tracing good grief, I outline what good grief looks like—how it behaves in Western culture—and ask: *who* can people grieve, *how* can people grieve, what forces dictate the norms of grieving, and how are these norms enforced? By interrogating the various cultural limitations on grieving and how ritualistic behaviors are observed in Western culture, I argue good grief's end goal is not to ensure the wellbeing of the griever, but to ensure the goals of capitalist, industrialized cultures are met through mitigation of affect, individualism, and hegemonic normativization. I then outline queer grief, elucidating what it looks like, tracing its queer heritage, and examining how society tries to ritualize queer grievers' behavior to "straighten out" the queerness of their grief. I argue that through the pathologization of a grief—of an affect—that exceeds and escapes the confines of social mores, Western culture precludes the affective potentiality of grief and the political potentiality of loss. Ultimately, this pathologization leads to a society that is ultimately death-adverse and sees certain individuals as expendable.

## **Good Grief**

In the early 1990s, psychologists began to shift their focus from the disorders that were preventing individuals from being happy to understanding how individuals can be happy. In the Introduction to their book, *Subjective Well-Being: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*, Fritz Strack, Michael Argyle, and Norbert Schwarz write, "Psychology has been preoccupied less with the conditions of well-being, than with the opposite: the

determination of human unhappiness” (1). Focusing on the “conditions of well-being,” “Positive psychology aims to understand ‘positive happiness’—by providing explanations of its causes—as well as to use this knowledge about happiness to create happiness. Positive psychology aims to make people happier. Positive psychology is positive about positive feeling” (Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* 8). Rather than “relieving the states that make life miserable” like “traditional” psychology, positive psychology focuses on “building the states that make life worth living” (Seligman xi). Through the lens positive psychology, traditional approaches to mental health worked on a pathology/remedy model, diagnosing disorders such as anxiety and depression and curing them with psychotherapy and/or medication. Positive psychology, on the other hand, focuses on “positive experiences, positive individual traits, and positive institutions” (“Our Mission”), which helps to provide people with “guideposts to the good life” (Seligman xi). From a cultural perspective, Sara Ahmed likens “the good life” to a path individuals follow by accumulating, chasing, and protecting objects and ideas imbued with the idea of happiness and feeling good, such as family, sociality, and good habits (*The Promise of Happiness*). The Positive Psychology Center sees this approach to helping people live the good life as yielding: “Families and schools that allow children to flourish[,] Workplaces that foster satisfaction and high productivity,” and more (“Our Mission”). However, by marking things like high productivity, hetero-/homonormativity, and progress as “positive” and part of a “good” life, positive psychology still operates on an implicit pathologization of things that interfere with these ideas, like grief. Thus, in a culture that has marked mental health as something that coheres to “the good life,” the majority of



an individual's affective experiences should be positive in order to be considered "normal."

Psychologically speaking, *good grief* is a grief that is attendant to what "could be conceived of as a psychic injury" (Stroebe 276) by accepting the loss and experiencing positive emotions once again (See: Shear; Bonanno and Kaltman; Boelen et al.; Engel; Bandini). The aim of good grief is to focus on "feeling good" after the loss, and is called "acute" or "uncomplicated" grief, which is defined as "run[ning] a consistent course" that includes:

[A]n initial phase of shock and disbelief for the event ... followed by a stage of developing awareness of the loss, marked by the painful effects of sadness, guilt, shame, helplessness, or hopelessness ... Finally, there is a prolonged phase of restitution and recovery during which the work of mourning is carried on, the trauma of the loss is overcome, and a state of health and well-being [is] re-established. (Engel 18)

This skeletal outline of grief marks the movement from recognition of the loss and the associated "negative" affects to overcoming the loss and the associated "positive" affects. For instance, when someone dies—especially someone who died due to prolonged illness—grievors usually remarked that the deceased is "in a better place." While at the beginning, the griever may say the person is in a better place, good grief means that the griever eventually *believes* the person is in a better place and begins to move on from feelings of "sadness, guilt, shame, helplessness [and/] or hopelessness" surrounding the loss. Guided by industrialization and fueled by the turn to positive psychology, the structured feelings surrounding grief demarcate what counts as good grief and have become institutionalized expectations that cohere to an abbreviated timeline of

acceptable grieving and are informally enforced through everyday interactions. In short, good grief is the grieving process which conforms to what psychologists, therapists, and even friends and family members have deemed an appropriate response to a significant loss.

Kenneth J. Doka writes that the social conventions of grief are “A set of norms that attempt to determine who, when, where, how, how long, and for whom people should grieve” (“Theoretical Overview” 4). When grieving is structured within a specified time and focused on a specific end goal, it becomes good grief. *Good grief* is an affective state that quickly recognizes an event of loss as real and irreversible and quickly returns to living the good life. Grief counselor and educator Dr. Alan Wolfelt writes about two examples of informal enforcements of grief’s quick timeline:

I recently counseled a widower. *Eight weeks* after his wife’s death, his friends told him, “It’s time for you to move on.” He came to see me because couldn’t reconcile what he was feeling inside with his friends’ advice. Needless to say, I affirmed his instinctive need to go backward before going forward. A 44-year-old woman I counseled had a similar experience. This time, just *three days* (!!!) after her relatively young husband died, a group of women in their neighborhood came to her and said, “We’ve been talking about you. You’re still fairly good looking. We’re going to put you on Match.com.” (December 27, emphases mine)

Because the friends of the widow and widower in this story have been inculcated with the structured feelings of grief and knew that good grief meant returning to the path of living the good life quickly, they urged their friends to begin seeking markers of the good life—heteronormativity and love—as soon as possible. Believing, similarly to positive psychology, that focusing on the conditions of well-being rather than dealing with the

underlying causes of negative feelings, these friends were encouraging the widow and widower to start living the good life again, which entailed finding another partner.

Further, the timeframes mentioned in Wolfelt's anecdote gesture to the institutionalized constraints placed on grieving. As it stands in the United States, there is no law that "require[s] payment for time not worked, including attending a funeral. This type of benefit is generally a matter of agreement between an employer and an employee" (United States Department of Labor, "Funeral Leave"); however, some states, like California, and other countries in the global West, like Canada, do have laws that make it "unlawful employment practice for an employer to refuse to grant a request by any employee to *take up to three days* of bereavement leave upon the death of a spouse, child, parent, sibling, grandparent, grandchild, or domestic partner" (Lowenthal, emphasis mine; See also: Employment and Social Development Canada). After the death of a loved one, a person is given three days after the date of death to (presumably) settle the loved one's estate and (begin to) recover from the loss. At least, they are *paid* for those three days, which means people of the working class—people who depend upon their paychecks to survive—are expected to only let the death of a loved one disorder their lives for three days.

This condensed timeline is directly related to the industrialization of society, in which people's time is not their own, it is their employers. In discussing the advent of "labour timed by the clock," E. P. Thompson writes, "[L]abour from dawn to dusk can appear to be 'natural' in a farming community ... And we may note similar 'natural' work-rhythms [in] industrial occupations: ... the charcoal fire must be attended and not

burn away through the turfs (and the charcoal burners must sleep beside it); once iron is in the making, the furnaces must not be allowed to fail” (60). While there might be a “naturalness” to the tasks required in industrialized cultures the time that falls into this rhythm is no longer the laborer’s own. The laborer is *selling* their time to the employer, and because they are being paid a wage by an employer, the employer is the one who “owns” their time (Gherardi). Since the “benefit” of being paid while attending to the death of loved one “is generally a matter of agreement between an employer and an employee” the employer, who already owns the employee’s time, becomes the one who partially dictates the conventions of mourning for their subordinates (United States Department of Labor, “Funeral Leave”).

If an employee is willing to forego their paychecks, the current laws in the United States (as well as Canada and the United Kingdom) grant “certain employees ... up to 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave per year. It also requires that their group health benefits be maintained during the leave” (United States Department of Labor, “FMLA (Family & Medical Leave)”). These twelve weeks are allowed to be taken for any number of reasons, but the death of a family member is often cited as a reason the leave can be taken. However, usually the people with enough capital to take this extended amount of time off *without* pay, are those in upper management, who are the ones in charge of other people’s time. This disparity between how long people can mourn the loss of a loved one clearly marks who has access to grieving their losses. Although contemporary Western culture has an obsession with expedient grief to ensure productivity, the people who *own* the time of others have an excess of time (and money) that allows them to

mourn more extensively. For instance, on the show *Grey's Anatomy*, when her husband dies, Meredith Grey (who is the chief of general surgery and part owner of the hospital) leaves work for nine months to cope with the loss. This is, of course, a spectacularized notion of mourning, but it points to the idea of those in power being able to more extensively mourn. The saliency in this example, though, is two-fold: the fact that for someone to deal with a death, to “reliev[e] the states that make life miserable” (Seligman xi), 1) they must be in a state of reasonable financial security and 2) they must take time off work—removing themselves from the larger populace—in order to accomplish this affective, emotional labor. Just because the global West denies the collective, communicable nature of affect and blithely follows the mythos of positivity, that does not mean Western culture is unaware of the catchy “stickiness” of affect (Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*); for these individuals to break the three-day, positivity-focused structure of grieving (that the government and employers are willing to pay for), they must remove themselves from their daily routine of work to, presumably, get better from or get over the loss so that they may return to work at full capacity rather than be a drain on the productivity of their coworkers.

By flagging grief as an affect that is not welcomed in public, the task(s) of working through the grief becomes personal and must be dealt with on the mourner’s “own” time. Often, the measures a culture takes to help aid grief come in the form of rituals that take place during a person’s time off from work. For instance, wakes and visitations are often held before the funeral itself and can be considered rituals in their own right or just part of the larger funeral ritual, but what is consistently true about

wakes and visitations is that they are often held in more private, personal locations. The website “FuneralWise” notes “A modern wake is, essentially, a celebration of the deceased” held in someone’s home that is different from “visitations and viewings [, which] tend to be subdued gatherings and often held at a funeral home” (“About Modern Day Wakes”). These specialized, personal locations that are seen as the best place to hold such sorrowful, affective gatherings are removed from the larger community, which marks grieving as something that must be handled personally rather than publicly. Below, I interrogate the rituals, like funerals and wakes, to show how these rituals are aimed at not only keeping grief structured as well as removing the work of healing from public.

### **Preventative Rituals**

In the time following a loss, the mourner’s life can seem extremely disordered and rife with uncertainty. Allison Gilbert writes in *Passed and Present: Keeping Memories of Loved Ones Alive*, “When someone we love dies, we usually benefit from being passive recipients of support. Between the rituals of burial and the recitation of certain prayers, between the wakes and shiva calls, the bereaved, and those who console them, know their role and take their place” (xxii). Nancy Reeves notes that “The wake, memorial service, and funeral are the most common death-related liminal rituals” (409)—the aim of which is to help individuals exert agency over an uncertain existence (Bial and Brady 95). This uncertainty is what Victor Turner termed “liminality” (*The Ritual Process*). Ritual behavior allows for a remaking of the community experiencing a liminal period to

re-establish order. In the case of death rituals, Reeves notes that there are often “preliminal rituals” and “postliminal rituals” that help aid in “a shift away from acute grief,” meaning these rituals were “developed for purification or protection” (409).

Reeves gives examples of both pre- and postliminal rituals, writing:

[T]here are preliminal rituals to prepare the dying person or their loved ones for the threshold. Examples of these include the Catholic Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, given just before death, or a “death-bed” gathering to hear the last instructions of the dying person and to say good-bye. Postliminal rituals can include scattering the ashes on the first anniversary of the death, holding a potlatch, or a ceremony to install the memorial marker at the gravesite. (Ibid.)

These rituals aid in warding off excessive grief by confronting the mourners (and the dying/deceased) with the reality of the death, which is believed to help the mourners reorder their worlds (Bonanno and Kaltman; Boelen et al.). These behaviors are part of what Catherine Bell terms “ritualization,” or “a way of acting that is designed and orchestrated to distinguish and privilege what is being done in comparison to other, usually more quotidian, activities” (74). Ritualization works through “various culturally specific strategies for setting some activities off from others” by “privileging a qualitative distinction between the ‘sacred’ and the ‘profane,’” to give a power to the behaviors that is “thought to transcend the powers of human actors” (Ibid.). Thus, in the case of a death, the ritualization of the activities surrounding the death imbue the mourners with a power bigger than themselves, and it is this power that can help “promote[ ] a positive sense of life direction or meaning” in mourners (Reeves 418).

The ways in which Western culture has attempted to use rituals as a preventative measure against excessive grief have varied over time. Leeat Granek focuses on how

religious institutions have been the main source of support for mourners, but with changes in how “death, dying, and grieving” are perceived “in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries represent shifts in ideology and culture that have left an open space for psychologists to step in and provide guidance” (32). As Western culture became more and more industrialized, it became a “death-denying” culture that saw death as a taboo subject (D. Harris), which means “the prescribed role of mourning in losses” and its “criteria of acceptability” have changed over time as well (D. Harris 244). This presents a challenge to the acceptability of mourning since “Social support is a very important factor in bereavement adjustment, and bereaved individuals will readily adhere to these social rules about their grief in order to prevent further losses that may occur through the withdrawal of their social support system” (D. Harris 246). The rules for how a person can mourn have changed and become stricter, and a mourner is reliant on their community to keep from falling deeper into grief, which can alienate them more. With this change in mourning, the authority figures on and in ritual processes have also changed.

While mostly only religious institutions once administered rituals, the “transformation in the culture” has now left open the possibility for new “social institutions [to] intervene in [the] once-deemed private emotions” surrounding mourning (Bandini 349). It should be noted that even though other institutions are taking over ritualized behavior in mourning, the “some transformational or confirmatory agency” the participants receive from the ritual isn’t diminished since “this power [comes] from an overarching parahuman authority, such as a deity, the state, or an



institution such as a university” (Santino 364). Although these rituals are being outsourced to various other institutions, “these rituals should never intrude on or complicate the grief of other mourners ... grieverers do have a right to rituals, but that right need not be exercised in a way that interferes” with the larger community or culture (Doka, “The Role of Ritual in the Treatment of Disenfranchised Grief” 146). This need to protect the positivity of the other people in a community by not letting grieverers’ ritual impinge upon them is aided and precipitated by the constriction of how long and where a person can grieve.

In the United States, how grief is pathologized might be understood to function in similar ways to how disability is also marked as deviance in public contexts. Specifically, “the common response of nondisabled people to disabled people, *of the normative to the deviant* [is] furtive yet relentless staring, aggressive questioning, and/or a turning away from difference, a refusal to see” (Kafer 15, emphasis added). How displays of “excessive” affect are pathologized and sought to be removed or sequestered, like disability, fall into a long line of United States culture trying to segregate and eradicate difference. Further, “Illness, ‘defect,’ ‘deviance,’ and disability are positioned as *fundamentally damaging to the fabric of the community*: polluting the gene pool, or weakening the nation, or destroying a family’s quality of life, or draining public services (or, often, some combination of the four)” (Kafer 31, emphasis mine). While grief and its “intense emotions” (Boelen et al. 121) are probably more easily resolved in private, it is important to understand how the expectation that such emotions should be handled in private aide in the pathologization of affect. When someone cannot control their

negative emotions or reconcile their grief, they can be diagnosed with a mental illness (explored further below), seen as defective, and/or be marked as deviant. This marking denotes how the person is interrupting their own chances at happiness, and, should they stay in public, they are also becoming a threat to the emotional habitus of happiness and positivity that Western culture has become obsessed with. Moreover, because grieverers are seen as not being able to control their negative emotions properly, they are perceived as weak and needing to “Just be strong” (qtd. in Fagan).

How a community administers and controls ritual and ritualization is important for understanding the pathology of grief and other negative affects. When someone dies, individuals begin to mourn their loss by attempting to work through the implications of that loss: How does someone reconcile the death of their parent with their own identity of *child*?; How does a spouse begin to think of themselves as *single* again?; How does a country begin to accept the death of a ruler? Through ritualization, “ambiguities and indeterminacies of experience” are ordered “into distinctions between good and evil, light and dark, spirit and flesh, above and below, inside and outside” (Faber 87). Friends and family want to believe the deceased was a good person through their lives and that their spirit is now resting in a better place. The dichotomies produced through ritualization are part of what Bell terms “a redemptive hegemony” (81), which Alyda Faber interprets as “an understanding of ultimate power and order in the world” that “The ritual agent learns ... through embodied practices” (87). As the ritual actor is performing, they are also “interpreting [the] symbolism” of the redemptive hegemony, which equips them with a “framework for understanding the world” and “is then used by

individuals to interpret experiences beyond the ritual space” (Ibid.). Moving beyond the ritual space as it applies to death for many means they are able to accept the death as permanent and real, and they use this framework to reorder the parts of their lives affected by the death. However, those who are either unable or unwilling to interpret the framework established by the ritualization in the case of a death become what I call “queer” griever. These individuals are resistant to the redemptive hegemony, making them targets for the social power that is upheld by the redemptive hegemony.

### **Queer Grief**

In the psychological community, any grief that doesn’t conform to *good grief* is known as complicated grief. While there are a number of definitions of complicated grief, many focus on 1) the mourner’s inability to integrate the loss into their knowledge base, meaning they do not believe or accept that the loss is real (Boelen et al. 111-112) and 2) the absence of purposefulness and positive affect for extended periods of time (Shear 462), which is closely tied to 3) the amount of time the mourner displays their grief (Bonanno and Kaltman 707-708). Complicated grief, like good grief, begins when a loss has occurred, but unlike good grief, it has no clear end according to grief literature (Worden; Bonanno and Kaltman; Boelen, Van Den Hout, and Van Den Bout; Shear). Further, it can be diagnosed after two weeks of disruptive symptoms (Bandini 348). Although two weeks is within part of the timeline that is “normal” according to the institutionalized confines of good grief (two weeks would fall into the unpaid time off given to certain employees, but is beyond the initial three-day timeline), “clinicians

should be able to properly distinguish ‘productive’ grief from more serious reactions of grief including feelings of isolation and the inability to be consoled” (Ibid.). When a person has not accepted the loss of loved one as real and/or have intense affective reactions to the loss, they become a complicated griever as well as a burden on productivity. Since complicated grief is marked by disruptive affective displays and feeling or being purposeless, complicated grievers become disruptions to their jobs, marking them as lacking purpose in their communities. In Western culture, when someone is seen as a burden to the community, they are typically isolated, pushed to the margins. Thus, when someone’s grief is seen as a burden to the community, they are typically met with hostility when they display that grief.

In *Feeling Backward*, Heather Love writes, “We need a genealogy of queer affect that does not overlook the negative, shameful and difficult feelings that have been so central to queer existence in the last century” (127). One of these queer affects is *queer grief*. In its distinction from *good grief*, *queer grief* is a negative, difficult affective state laced with the shame of broken connections and the loss of love. Queer individuals have long had a specific relationship with grief: from being persecuted and killed for their sexuality to being barred from grieving their loved ones adequately. However, like many queer ways of being modalities of critique, *queer grief* extends beyond just the queer community. Just as moments of same-sex attraction—and other defining features of queerness—can be felt in someone who does not identify as queer, *queer grief* can be felt by anyone who exceeds, disrupts, and/or escapes the confines of normal grieving as Western culture has defined it (*good grief*).

*Queer grief* is the pathologized expression of and response to grief that destabilizes the mourner's life in a way that removes them from what their community has deemed "normal." I use the qualifier of "queer" to show the connection between the ways in which "pathological" mourners are akin to the queer community and because queer grief is indicative of how queer individuals have been precluded from being able to mourn their losses. How queer grief works to unsettle and destabilize the homogenizing views of how people are meant to mourn reflects the same way queer theory works to unsettle and destabilize normativizing beliefs about sexuality and identity. In "Homographesis," Lee Edelman traces how "homosexuality becomes socially constituted in ways that not only make it available to signification, but also cede to it the power to signify the instability of the signifying function *per se*, the arbitrary and tenuous nature of the relationship between any signifier and signified" (191–192). With this introduction of homosexuality into the field of social signification and its destabilizing power to cause semiotic slippage between signifier and signified, "homosexuality comes to signify the potential permeability of every sexual signifier—and by extension, of *every* signifier as such—by an 'alien' signification" (Ibid. 192, emphasis mine). This ability for homosexuality to unsettle the totality of heterosexuality—and the way genderqueer, gender fluid, and agender unsettle the totality of gender norms—speaks to the same ability that queer grief has to unsettle good grief's totality. Without the qualifiers of "complicated" or "abnormal," *grief* would only be grief; everyone would move through the same process and steps to mourn the loss that are explicated above, and then return to "normal life." However, when individuals begin to put language to the different

experiences they have in grief, the totalizing power of *grief* slips.

The (in)ability for some mourners to share their experiences of grief also points to the queerness of queer grief. Due to queer individuals' marginal positionality in society, they are often not allowed to grieve the losses of their loved ones (due to the lack of recognition of various forms of queer relationality) and/or their own lives/deaths are not allowed to be grieved. Because queerness is seen as a threat to heterosexuality/normativity, there's a "break in the connection" between normativity and queerness that pushes queerness and queer lives to the margins (Probyn 13). In *The Promise of Happiness*, Sara Ahmed analyzes the movie *If These Walls Could Talk 2* to show how the first film in the trilogy depicts the impossibility of queer mourning in heteronormative society when Edith is not able to fully mourn her partner's death. Edith refers to Abby (her partner) as a "friend" repeatedly throughout the film and is not able to see Abby in her final moments due to the rigid distinction of what counts as "family." Ahmed writes: "When queer grief is not recognized, because queer relationships are not recognized, then you become 'nonrelatives,' you become unrelated, you become not" (*The Promise of Happiness* 109). As pointed out above, the distinction for who *is allowed* to grieve a loss depends on the person's relationship to the deceased. Until 2015, domestic partnerships were not included in the list covered the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) (United States Department of Labor, *Federal Job-Protected Family and Medical Leave Rights Extended to Eligible Workers in Same-Sex Marriages*), and since funeral/bereavement leave is given at the discretion of the employer, there was little to no recourse for queer individuals to take to grieve their loved ones, especially for queer

individuals in non-normative relationships (e.g. polyamorous relationships). Rather than being only given a truncated timeline to grief, queer individuals were—still *are* in some cases (Lipinski)—quite literally given no time away from work to deal with the loss. These institutionalized barriers are only just part of the ability to grieve as well when family members have the ability to ban one another from the privatized rituals of mourning in Western culture (“Man Denied Singing at Grandmother’s Funeral because of ‘Gay Lifestyle’”). Thus, because queer individuals have been barred from the “normal” grieving patterns and rituals, they are precluded from the structured feelings of *good grief* and therefore are only able to grieve queerly.

Further, because queerness and queer lives are marginal, their expressions of grief are often inflected with a sense of shame that comes from broken connections between individuals. George A. Bonanno and Stacey Kaltman write some expressions of grief are “perceived by ... observers [to be] less well adjusted [*sic*]” and those mourners expressing that grief “evoked in the observers greater frustration and less compassion” (722). Whether this contempt comes from a distain for decreased productivity or from a distain for public displays of negative emotions, the recoil from grievers elucidates the elements of shame within queer grief. For Probyn, “Shame emerges as a kind of primal reaction to the very possibility of love—either of oneself or of another. The fear of contempt and abandonment is experienced as intensely personal” (3). This possibility of love is based on “*interest* in a more specific way” than just being “neither a studied expression of wonderment nor a naive deployment of ignorance,” but instead as “constitut[ing] lines of connection between people and ideas. It describes a kind of

affective investment we have in others” (Probyn 12-13). Thus, when a queer griever is treated with contempt, the affective investment connecting people is broken. These queer grievers are stigmatized by their community and taught to be shameful for their affective displays of grief. In what follows, I look at self-help books, which are born into a lineage of affective control, to see how the dominant ideologies of grief gesture to the threat of queer grief while also attempting to prevent/normalize any potentially queer expressions of grief.

### **Re-Structuring through Self-Help**

In her article “A Short History of Self-Help,” Jessica Lamb Shapiro notes that the genre of self-help began with the “Ancient Egyptian genre called ‘Sebayt,’ an instructional literature on life (‘Sebayt’ means ‘teaching’).” Finding the origin of self-help books later in history, Jennie Batchelor asserts that self-help books “Originat[ed] in medieval courtesy literature, and [were] recently re-branded in the self-help manual.” Though the exact start of the self-help genre isn’t clear, the conventions of it are and center on “offering advice on mores and manners, spiritual guidance and practical information on state and household duties” (Batchelor). According to Navina Krishna Hooker, Jacques Carré’s book, *The Crisis of Courtesy: Studies in the Conduct-Book in Britain, 1600-1900*, traces how “the emergence of a literate middle class” also precipitated “a new set of behavioural standards” (453). She writes, “[T]he demand for advice on conduct shifted from the courtier’s desire for political promotion, achieved largely through the art of dissimulation and flattery, to the merchant’s more pragmatic



preoccupation with what Carré calls the ‘efficiency of conduct, an almost utilitarian obsession with success’” (Ibid.). With the rise of the literate middle class, the advice solicited from the books moved from social capital to financial capital; and while the contemporary self-help book genre ranges from social capital to financial capital (and various other kinds of capital in between), the genre as a whole still has an “obsession with success.”

Often, the success that is trying to be achieved is that of being a successful *woman*. According to Batchelor, conduct books of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries instructed women “to create themselves as objects of desire, but paradoxically enjoined to suppress their own sexual passions in favour of a feminine ideal based upon chastity.” This means that “women must be beautiful ... and display ‘sweetness’ in gesture, deportment and conversation. Above all, however, she should ... always ‘behave her selfe’” (Batchelor). The emphasis on women in the conduct book genre comes from the conduct book moving “away from the public arena of the court to the private realm of the household” (Batchelor). All these qualities—chastity, sweetness, suppression of sexuality, and submission to the husband—were touted as the way proper women conducted themselves, but they were also qualities that lead to the development of the Cult of Domesticity or True Womanhood (Palczewski; Hurner). In the Cult of Domesticity, women were relegated to the home and meant to care for the children and be subservient to their husbands, which is also much of what was being promoted in the conduct books of the same time. For these reasons, women are the implied audience of conduct books and, by extension, self-help books; and, through the reading and

implementation of the advice given in the books, women can become the ideal woman that Western culture has conditioned them to become.

That said, I would like to note that there are in fact self-help books geared towards men. Some of the most popular self-help books (e.g. *How to Win Friends and Influence People*) are unisex or non-gendered. However, the self-help books that most closely resemble their conduct book ancestors are those that emphasize social capital or behavioral standards, whereas the books geared towards non-gendered audiences or male audiences emphasize financial capital and business savvy. The difference between these two focuses in the self-help books keeps them as two separate categories: on the one hand, women are being sold books that tell them how to behave and raise children effectively (e.g. *What to Expect When You're Expecting* or *I Suck at Relationships So You Don't Have To*), and on the other hand, men are being sold books that help them become better business men and providers for their families. Rebecca Hazleden analyzes various self-help books and finds there to be a connection between these two sides of the self-help industry. She writes, "The emphasis on the relationship with the self, and the development of mastery over the emotions advocated in the books, is related to the values held in liberal democratic societies" (413). Therefore, as women are being told how to act and raise their children, they are being inculcated with the same capitalistic obsession with success (as a mother or demure wife) that men are being bombarded with in self-help books marketed toward them (which emphasize success in business). Hazleden also links her assertion about self-help books to Dana L. Cloud's arguments that rhetoric of therapy is used strategically in capitalist societies to serve the purposes of

economic prosperity (*Control and Consolation in American Culture and Politics: Rhetoric of Therapy*). This emphasis on controlling emotions and cultivating the relationship to one's self not only function as markers of success in these self-help books, but they are also seen as characteristics deemed appropriate by individualistic societies.

Interestingly, many of the popular books that are usually associated with grief “self-help” books, such as *On Grief and Grieving* by Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, *The Year of Magical Thinking* by Joan Didion, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* by Harold Kushner, and *A Grief Observed* by C. S. Lewis, are not actually part of the self-help genre. These books are either memoir—many not tied specifically to grief but to bad experiences in general—or they do not give readers a clear-cut way to move through their grief with specific steps. *Motherless Daughters* by Hope Edelman is a book that is categorized as self-help that is also very popular. It was not included in this study, though, because it explicitly genders the ideal reader of the book. Even though the genre of self-help has been marketed more towards women—especially those that seek to help readers ameliorate their emotions—I chose books that did not explicitly gender their audiences in an attempt to not preclude men from being able to (queerly) grieve. As Allison Gilbert, one of the authors of the books analyzed below, writes, “Loss is universal[,] so no gender specifications” should be made for the audience (Gilbert, “Re: New Submission for Get in Touch”). The two self-help books of particular interest to this study are *Passed and Present: Keeping Memories of Loved Ones Alive* by Allison Gilbert and *Grief One Day at a Time: 365 Meditations to Help You Heal after Loss* by Dr. Alan D. Wolfelt.

These two books seemingly take two separate approaches to the “healing” grief, but both are reliant on what J. William Worden called “tasks of mourning,” which are as follows: 1) accept the reality of the loss, 2) experience the pain of grief, 3) adjust to an environment with the deceased missing, and 4) withdraw emotional energy from the relationship with the deceased and invest it in other relationships (Worden 39). In *Grief One Day at a Time*, the tasks are in the entries that include: a beginning quote that frames the short discussion of focus for the day and a meditation or mantra the reader is supposed to ruminate on throughout the day. Each day presents a task that helps Wolfelt’s readers structure their actions and thoughts for the day. *Passed and Present* takes a less structured approach to the tasks of mourning by giving the readers an exhaustive list of ways to preserve the memory of their loved ones without necessarily setting a clear schedule as to when the readers should complete the tasks. These books were chosen because they were some of the only “self-help” books on grief that 1) deal with grief that lasts a long period of time; and 2) offer specific steps or guidelines to help readers overcome their grief. These two defining features of *Passed and Present* and *Grief One Day at a Time* are important in how they acknowledge the threat of a grief that escapes the confines of how individuals *ought* to grieve, but attempt to quash that grief through the same regimentation of structured feelings of grief.

*Passed and Present* and *Grief One Day at a Time* both situate themselves as dealing with individuals who are dealing with the effects of complicated grief. According to psychological literature, acute grief—which I’m connecting to *good grief*—distinguishes itself as lasting up to one year after the loss with only occasional, non-disruptive

symptoms (Bonanno and Kaltman 710), which means that acute grief *may* last up to one year, but the symptoms do not interfere with the griever's everyday life. In *Passed and Present* and *Grief One Day at a Time* the authors are expecting their readers either to *be* grieving for at least one year (while they are working through the books) or to *have been* grieving for over a year (which has led them to the books). Wolfelt writes, "As you have learned, grief is a one-day-at-a-time journey, but it does not magically 'end' after a year ... Grief never truly ends, but it does begin to get easier." Wolfelt acknowledges that the grief his readers are experiencing is not the acute grief that resolves around the one year anniversary of the loss, and therefore he is anticipating that his readers are experiencing a more complicated form of grief. Likewise, Allison Gilbert writes that when griever's need help the most, "a year after, five years later, fifteen—the outreach that once provided so much support is mostly gone" (*Passed and Present* xxii). Gilbert not only notes the temporal aspect of complicated grief, but has also articulated the isolation and lack of consolation someone with complicated grief feels. Although these two books do not name "complicated grief," the timelines they reference as being longer than a year and the isolation and negative affects they assume their readers are feeling point to the fact they are aiming to help those griever's who do not fit the mold of what grief *ought* to be. In this section, I illustrate how *Grief One Day at a Time* presents a method for overcoming complicated grief that conforms to the mainstream psychological idea of overcoming (complicated) grief, whereas *Passed and Present* elucidates the ways grief can escape those confines.

### *Ritualization of Grief*

Keeping in mind that ritual(ization) is the method deployed to “heal” all griever and that complicated grief is distinguished from its acute counterpart by griever’s extended period of displaying grief along with a lack of purpose and positive affect due to their inability to accept the loss as real, I want to interrogate how *Passed and Present* and *Grief One Day at a Time* ritualizes their readers’ behavior. Rather than viewing how the books attempt to restructure their readers’ feelings as *ritual*, it is better to see how the books guide the readers through a *ritualization* of acting. Catherine Bell sees “‘ritualization’ as a strategic way of acting ... [that] emerges as a particular cultural strategy of differentiation linked to particular social effects and rooted in a distinctive interplay of a socialized body and the environment it structures” (7–8). Ritualization, for Bell, is a way to show the difference between populations and those they excise from what is considered normal; thus, with complicated griever, because *ritual* hasn’t helped cure their grief, they must turn to *ritualization* to not only show how they are different from the larger “socialized body” of people but to also help heal the grief they are feeling. The tasks present in both books help those affected with complicated grief “take action” (Worden 38) and exercise control over their “derealization, disorganization, and preoccupation” caused by the complicated grief (Bonanno and Kaltman 715). In exercising control over their grief, complicated mourners accept their loss as real and can begin recovering from their grief. *Grief One Day at a Time* and *Passed and Present* are aiming to change the negative affect of complicated grief to more positive feelings of “comfort” and “happiness,” helping the readers to “begin to integrate [their] grief”

(Wolfelt, “Welcome”).

Within behavioral therapy literature, a popular method helping complicated griever accept the loss is called exposure therapy, in which “patients are invited to tell the story of their loss, beginning with the events that led up to the death and moving on to the death itself, the moments of the leave taking and funeral, and the immediate aftermath of the loss” (Boelen, Van Den Hout, and Van Den Bout 121). The therapist then focuses on what are called “hot spots,” or “recollections of moments that represent the most painful aspects of the loss,” to make the patient “articulate the painful aspect of the loss the hot spots are related to, to face these aspects, and to fully connect with the feelings linked with these aspects” (Ibid.). In this method, “the patient [is forced] to fully connect with the reality of the loss” (Ibid.). Since accepting the loss as real is imperative to conforming to what grief *ought* to be, exposure therapy that focuses on confronting the griever is the “reality” of the death is an effective method in grief counselling.

By confronting readers with the loss at the beginning of the daily entries, *Grief One Day at a Time* is able to regiment and ritualize exposure therapy. Throughout the book, there are one hundred fourteen entries that begin with the fact of the readers having experienced a loss; moreover, many of these entries stress the loss multiple times within a single entry. For instance, the entry for December 16 is as follows:

*“Ten years, **she’s dead**, and I still find myself some mornings reaching for the phone to call her. She could no more be gone than gravity or the moon.”*

—Mary Karr

That initial shock and numbness we experienced when we first **learned of the death**—it never totally goes away. Years later, we still find ourselves thinking that **the person who died** could walk through the door at any moment.

Over time, we mostly come to terms with **their gone-ness**, but never 100 percent. A part of our hearts and minds seems unable to truly believe it. At times, I still wish and wait for my dad to walk through the door and back into my life.

Maybe the part of us that still clings to the impossibility of **the death** is right. Maybe it's the part that knows that **death** is but an illusion.

Something to ponder for today, anyway.

*Sometimes I still can't believe that you're gone.* (emphases mine)

In this one entry, the reader is confronted with their loss seven times. Starting with the opening quote that mentions a death, continuing to the (re)iteration of death and loss in nearly every sentence of the daily discussion, and finishing with the mantra/meditation for the reader to ponder throughout the day focusing on the loved one being deceased, the reader is repeatedly confronted with the fact someone they love has died. Moreover, the entries that stress the loss at the start (like December 16) exhibit a certain pattern over the course of the year the book spans. January features only five entries that start with stressing the loss, three of which are in the first half of the month. From February to July, the number of times the loss is stressed at the start of entries is around nine<sup>5</sup> times. August, September, and October feature upwards of ten entries that begin with the loss, with September having the most of any month with fifteen entries that begin with the loss. November falters in the regularity by dropping to only seven entries before December ends the year with thirteen entries. The pattern of these entries follows the same pattern of a simple plot diagram: a flat line or slight increase at the start before a steep increase leading to a climatic high point before decreasing into a resolution. While

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<sup>5</sup> February, March, and June have nine entries that start with the loss; May and July have eight entries, and April has only seven entries.



*Grief One Day at a Time* has the added increase at the end of the year in December, the general format still holds true to a plot diagram, which reinforces the idea that there is a general structure to grief that should be adhered to in order to move beyond the negative feelings associated with the affective state of grief. By following a general format, *Grief One Day at a Time* restructures the feelings of complicated grief to help them better conform to what is expected. Further, through this ritualization of consistently and regularly being confronted with the loss that has caused a person's queer grief, allows the griever to begin and eventually accept the loss as real, moving them toward feeling "normal" again.

Gilbert confronts her readers with the loss by urging them to remember the person they've lost. Relying on Therese A. Rando's writing on complicated mourning (*Treatment of Complicated Mourning*; "The Increasing Prevalence of Complicated Mourning"; *How To Go On Living When Someone You Love Dies*), Gilbert notes that "remembering is so closely intertwined with healing" (*Passed and Present* xxii). Since the readers of Gilbert's book are being given ritualized tips on how to remember their loved ones who have passed, it can be assumed that many of these readers have not had the chance to fully and completely "heal" from their loss because they have not been able to adequately remember their loved one. The ritualization of remembering in *Passed and Present*, thus, is aimed at helping the readers heal through the Forget Me Nots. However, these activities point more toward a grief that exceeds the confines of what is expected of mourners.

Forget Me Not thirty-four, for instance, helps readers on the anniversaries of loved

ones' deaths, which can be "difficult because so often [mourners] remember alone" on those days (91). This activity that is meant to help the readers not remember "alone" by having close friends and other loved ones reach out to the griever on a hard day, but it instead illustrates the mainstream feelings toward grief. Gilbert suggests "send a calendar invitation to a small group of people reminding them of [the lost loved ones'] anniversaries. That way ... [mourners would] be assured a supportive text or phone call on the ... days [mourners] need them most" (Ibid.). When a reader sends a friend the calendar invite, they become a yearly obligation in the friend's calendar that varies in severity depending on how complicated the reader's grief is. If a person with good grief were to get a call or text from a friend on a parent's death anniversary, they would likely chat with the friend for a short period of time—because good grief is a grief that has remedied itself quickly and is no longer a disruption to productivity. However, if someone with more complicated grief were to do the same, either the friends might "be inclined to avoid the participant," or the grievers might be met with "greater frustration and less compassion" (Bonanno and Kaltman 722). Gilbert gestures to the hostility toward complicated grievers and how many people are not inclined to talk about the mourner's pain; however, with the idea of a calendar invitation, not only is the initiation of contact on death anniversaries placed in the hands of the person reaching out to comfort the mourner, but the person who is expected to reach out when they see the notification does not *have* to and can choose to ignore the notification. When people begin turning away from those with complicated grief, they are often left alone to remember their loved ones.

### *Internalization of Grief*

Within discourse about bereavement, grief, and mourning, there is a bit of semiotic slippage that comes with the terms. For many, the terms are interchangeable, but according to M. Katherine Shear, the terms are different. She writes:

*[B]ereavement* is the experience of having lost someone close; *grief* is the reaction to bereavement, comprising thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and physiological changes that vary in pattern and intensity over time ... Mourning is the process by which the finality and consequences of the loss are assimilated into memory systems, and capacity restored for joy and satisfaction in ongoing life. (461, emphases in original)

For Shear, the difference between grief and mourning is that mourning is a process of overcoming grief; through mourning, people can once again feel “joy and satisfaction” in their lives after having suffered a loss. Wolfelt agrees with Shear in that he views mourning as a process of healing, writing, “Mourning one day at a time brings healing one day at a time” (Ibid.). Further, Wolfelt notes the “passive” nature of grieving to mourning’s “activ[ity]” (September 23). What’s interesting about Wolfelt’s distinction between grief and mourning is how he considers “Mourning [to be] where we express our grief outside ourselves. While grief is internal, mourning is external” (“Welcome”). Within the structured feelings of grief, however, grief is not meant to be shared with other people; it is a pathologized affect that is not welcome in public. Keeping in line with the ideology of grief, *Grief One Day at a Time* keeps its readers’ grief mostly internal; conversely, *Passed and Present* encourages its readers’ to share their grief regularly. For Gilbert and Wolfelt, the distinction between grief and mourning is about

the expression of grief or lack thereof.

Mourning in *Grief One Day at a Time* is also ritualized by incorporating mourning into the readers' actions for the day. The book regularly mentions mourning and frames the daily meditations as helping readers mourn more—since it's the basis of healing—but thirty-four of the three hundred sixty-five meditations<sup>6</sup> focus on helping or guiding the reader to express their grief outwardly, which leaves three hundred thirty-one other days where the reader is controlling their emotions by keeping them interior. Moreover, some of the thirty-four entries focus on mourning in ways that don't necessitate sharing the grief with *another individual*; rather, these entries guide the readers to mourn through methods that are solitary such as praying or journaling. This emphasis of *not* expressing the negative affect of grief outwardly in public speaks to the structured feelings of grief in Western culture that keeps grief under wraps. The complicated grievers using this book will become conditioned to mourn, but only when no one else is around. By isolating mourning, the structured feelings of grief are re-instantiated and complicated grievers are not an active burden on their communities.

Gesturing to the hushed nature of grief, Gilbert writes, “For years, I struggled. Not only with my parents’ and other family members’ belongings, but with *how* to talk about them and *when*. Outside Thanksgiving and other set occasions, I hesitated to bring them up in conversation” (xxv). By emphasizing the desire to express her grief, the desire to

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<sup>6</sup> The meditations focusing on mourning rather than grief are: January 2, January 3, January 8, January 23, January 28, February 2, February 21-23, March 4, March 5, March 12, March 18, March 23, April 4-6, April 9, April 10, May 10, May 11, May 26, June 1, June 17, June 27, June 30, July 22, July 26, July 27, August 6, August 19, August 28, September 3, September 4, September 7, September 19, September 30, October 25, October 30, November 3, November 10, November 25, and December 24

mourn, Gilbert is emphasizing how her—and her readers’—grief escapes the confines of grief ought to be. She later remarks that there aren’t set ways that society gives individuals for remembering and sharing the memory of their loved one, and she hopes that the Forget Me Nots in her book help people share the memories of loved ones more often and freely. Looking at the Forget Me Nots, fifty-four of the eighty-five provide little-to-no outlet of the memory of a loved one into the outside world; these tips and activities are either done in the home, are introspective, and/or require no outside participants. Seven of the Forget Me Nots present the *possibility* of sharing with another person (like Forget Me Not 34 mentioned above), but many of these rest on the actions of another person. For instance, Forget Me Not sixty-three is entitled “Foster Serendipity,” and involves the mourner leaving a photo album in a “high traffic area” (154). Gilbert then instructs readers to “Do something nearby while you wait expectantly for a family member to walk by” (Ibid.). The “serendipity” of the moment comes full circle when the unsuspecting family member asks the mourner about the photo album, thus opening the door for mourning. However, this rests on the action of the other person rather than leaving the agency of mourning in the hands of the reader. Forget Me Nots like sixty-three that are aimed at helping the readers mourn ultimately fall short of their goal in that they necessitate someone else asking the griever to share their feelings. This means, grievers are only allowed to share their grief *when they are asked*.

Within the handful of Forget Me Nots that allow readers to share their grief outside of themselves with people who were not affected by the loss (i.e. not family members of the deceased), many actually isolate the reader from the larger community.

Only eight of the Forget Me Nots feature sharing memories of loved ones with non-relatives, but three of those feature people who are paid for the interaction (a “Memory-Keeper,” who is someone “commission[ed]” to create pieces of art from memorabilia sent to them [39-40], a “Personal Historian,” who is essentially a genealogist [98-99], and a psychic medium [128-132]). This means, of the eighty-five tips and activities given in the book, only five offer readers a way to share their grief outside of themselves to people who were not affected by the grief. One such activity is Forget Me Not forty-three, entitled “Host a Memory Bash” (113-114). In this Forget Me Not, readers call upon other people mourning the loss of a loved one—possibly other complicated griever, but also potentially those who are in the early stages of acute grief as well—and invite them over for a night of remembering one another’s loved ones (Ibid.). Through this party, complicated griever are isolating themselves from the larger community, meaning those who are not grieving; perhaps this idea comes from an attempt at comradeship with other mourners, but it could also rest upon Western culture’s proclivity for turning away from that which disgusts or displeases (Wolfelt August 18). The readers of both *Grief One Day at a Time* and *Passed and Present* are (unintentionally) reifying the structured feelings of grief by keeping their grief to themselves unless they are asked and/or are with other griever, which marks grief as something that is meant to be private.

Although the ritualization of the readers’ behavior might be efficacious in disciplining their grief, it is up for debate as to whether or not prescriptive ritual(ization) is the key to healing complicated grief. Corina Sas and Alina Coman write that “Personal grief rituals are beneficial in dealing with complicated grief, but challenging to design, as

they require symbolic objects and actions meeting clients' emotional needs" (558). The need for personalization of the ritual in healing complicated grief makes the ritual(ization) present in the self-help books questionable since what is being offered is not specifically tailored to the *individual* readers, but is instead homogenized for *all* readers. This means that a depersonalized ritual(ization) is attempting to "heal" what other depersonalized and widely adopted rituals were unable to "heal" in the first place. Due to the disparity between the homogenized ritualization the books offer and the personalized ritualization needed to heal complicated grief, the books (unintentionally) are more focused in *disciplining* the complicated grief felt by their readers rather than *healing* their readers' grief. What's interesting about these methods is that they are *both* the means of identifying the pathology of complicated grief, *and* they are the methods the self-help books are asking the mourners to use in their road to "recovery."

### **Daring to Queerly Greive**

When grief conforms to what Western culture deems grief *ought* to be, it is *good grief*, a grief that resolves itself quickly to not disrupt the productivity of a community. This means that a person must quickly move past a loss and not let it disrupt their everyday life. Because good grief is seemingly omnipresent in the institutionalized facets of society—limited amount of time off from work, the quick turn-around of funerals and wakes after the death, and the general pursuit of happiness that characterizes Western culture—it has become seen as what is normal. However, there are often "*changes in presence*" caused by a loss that do not "await definition, classification, or rationalization

before they exert palpable pressures and set effective limits on experience and on action” (Williams 132) and that elucidate how certain institutionalized structures have gotten “under our skin” (Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* 216). When something gets under our skin, it becomes what Judith Butler calls *incorporation*, meaning whatever ideology we *ought* to adhere to becomes second nature (154). Good grief gets under a queer griever’s skin because it highlights the shame that accompanies the broken connections between a person and their larger community as well as the broken connections between how they feel and how they *ought* to feel.

When a person’s grief exceeds or escapes what grief *ought* to be or *ought* to look like, it removes them from what has been deemed normal (*good grief*) and they become queer grievers. Because grief *ought* to be observed for close family members like parents, children, siblings, and spouses, and because queer individuals are often disowned or their relations are not recognized as legitimate by various institutions, queer individuals are not allowed to observe grief at all. If a queer person is not allowed to apply for second parent adoption of a child with their partner and the child dies, structured feelings of grief (and some state laws [Human Rights Campaign]) preclude them from being part of those who can take time off for and grieve the loss of the child. Further, when a family disowns a queer family member, they are marking their death as ungrievable. Queer personal histories are often filled with utterances such as “you’re not my [daughter/son/child] anymore” or “I don’t have a [daughter/son/child].” When queers are excised from who is considered “family,” they are no longer considered part of the list of “close family members” who can be grieved. Due to queerness’ unintelligible



relationality, queers are precluded from being able to grieve.

The methods of healing complicated grief presented in the self-help books *Grief One Day at a Time* and *Passed and Present* cannot “heal” queer grief due to the fact queer grief escapes what grief *ought* to be. What separates queer grief from complicated grief is that a queer grief is a grief that *should never have existed* and therefore cannot become “complicated.” Even if a queer person is feeling the absence of purposefulness and positive affect for extended periods of time, which are two of the three identifiers of complicated grief, they are not allowed to accept the loss as real because queer relations are not seen as relationships that can be broken by loss. In other words, because queer relationality is not intelligible, it cannot be seen as having been lost. When queers grieve, they violate the structured feelings of grief—they escape *good grief*—and their feelings (like their bodies) are marked as deviant and abnormal.

It has become normal to not ponder the negativity of loss—how *bad* losing someone truly feels; it has become normal to apologize for displays of negative emotion surrounding someone’s death; it has become normal to look away from dead. Ultimately, this emotional habitus of being a death-denying culture, as Darcy Harris put it, has marked people as expendable. If we *ought* not let the loss of someone close to us disrupt our everyday lives, then no loss (other than the loss of our own life) ought not disrupt our everyday lives. If we are not supposed to linger on the negativity of losing someone we are related to, someone our lives were so intimately bound up with, then we should feel no responsibility to linger on impact of anyone’s death. People become expendable because the injustice of death becomes eschewed as Western culture looks away from

sources of discomfort and negativity and instead focuses on what makes life worth living.

## Chapter Two: Deploying Queer Grief: ACT UP and Black Lives Matter

“Seldom has a society so savaged people during their hour of loss.”

—Douglas Crimp, “Mourning and Militancy”

*November 10, 2016 — Philadelphia, PA*

*The National Communication Association annual convention was a week earlier than usual, starting the day after the presidential election. This was the election Donald J. Trump won, becoming the forty-fifth President of the United States of America. With Communication Studies being a largely liberal discipline (Linvill and Mazer), there was a palpable grief surrounding the conference—a depression mixed with disbelief and anger. Many scholars joined the marches and rallies happening in the streets of Philly every night. Others were holding out hope the electoral college vote in December would have different results (it didn’t). A few were probably happy with the results. Anything, really, can happen at a conference, but this one, with so many people affected in different ways, held more potential. It was my first national conference; I was looking for doctorate programs; I didn’t really know what to expect. Everyone told me NCA was “something else” but with little indication what that something else was.*

*As I sat in the audience for the Opening Session, “Putting Bodies on the Line and Words into Action—Celebrating the Joys of, Challenges in, and Opportunities for Civic Engagement,” I noticed various people around the perimeter of the room putting down masking tape. They would tear off a piece from the roll, bend down to the floor, and stand back up without the piece they’d torn off. Since the audience was full, it made it hard to see the floor, but I assumed the people were either volunteers with convention or staff from the*

*hotel, working to secure the electrical cords leading to the stage and A/V equipment. When I saw one of my professors, though, I knew it wasn't part of the presentation we came to see. About that time, a person walked up to the podium on stage.*

*“A lot of people felt like death with the news of the election,” they said.<sup>7</sup> “But many have felt like death long before. Movements come from a constant tug of fear and a desire to survive—not thrive, just survive: trans\* women of color, Black people, indigenous people...”*

*As Dr. Amber Johnson was speaking, people began lying down in the masking tape outlines. It was a die in (Roy). While the opening session speakers gave their presentations, there were people motionless, lifeless in the aisles surrounding the audience and the stage—literally putting their bodies on the line. The demonstration was not about any one social movement, but rather gestured to the many different social movements that have been occurring in the past few years (A. Johnson). After the demonstrators stood up, they left the room of the presentation and headed to a larger demonstration in the hotel lobby and throughout the city of Philadelphia.*

This demonstration is only one instance, but activists ranging from ACT UP to BLM have long deployed grief in their practices as a motivating affect. Death and loss are events that impinge upon our realities; they disrupt what we

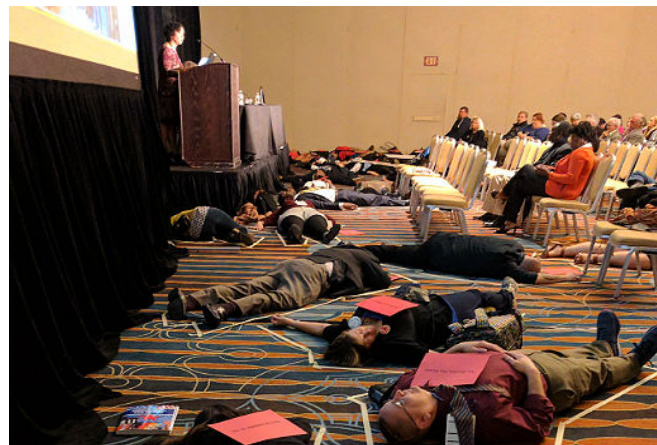


Figure 1: Die In at NCA Opening Session

<sup>7</sup> The person was Dr. Amber Johnson, which I learned after the demonstration at NCA. The quote is also not exact since neither they nor I could fully remember what was said when we spoke on the phone on March 2, 2017.

expect. Grief follows the loss, further disrupting our everyday lives, tinging our days with sadness and anger and a host of other emotions. Grief affects us. In tracing the etymology of “affect,” Deborah Gould notes its importance in social movements. She writes:

Affect. Being affected, being moved. Emotion. Motion. Movement, from the post-classical Latin *movementum*, meaning “motion,” and earlier, *movimentum*, meaning “emotion,” and then later, “rebellion,” or “uprising.” The movement in “social movements” gestures toward the realm of affect; bodily intensities; emotions, feelings, and passions; and toward uprising. (*Moving Politics* 2–3)

Affect, according to Gould, animates and moves social movements. In line with Gould, I analyze the organizations ACT UP and Black Lives Matter to uncover the political, affective potentiality of their deployment of *queer grief*. As was established in the previous chapter, *queer grief* is a pathologized affect that destabilizes and/or escapes the dominant conceptions of what grief *ought* to be and how it *ought* to be observed in society. At the center of queer grief is the refusal to accept a death or loss; while the first chapter of this project focused on the psychological, emotional ways a society pathologizes and attempts to remedy queer grief, this chapter claims that the refusal to accept a death or loss produces rhetorical possibilities that can be taken up by social activists and movements.

In rhetorical terms or action, a failure to accept a death or loss does not hinge on the griever accepting the death *as real* as it is in the psychological sense. Rather, a rhetorical refusal of acceptance means the individual griever does not accept the grounds upon which the loss occurred or does not accept the loss as the structured feelings of

grief dictate the loss ought to be observed. For instance, when Donald Trump won the 2016 Presidential Election, the left, far left, and right-of-center voters and politicians immediately began to question the decision with claims of election fraud (Marans), worries over rights (Toosi), and outcries of “#NotMyPresident” (West). These outright rejections of the election were met with admonishments of “grow up” and “get over it” (*Reince Priebus: Democrats Need to “Grow Up” and Accept That They Lost Election*; “Trump Won the Election, Get over It”), thus illustrating the fact that protestors were not accepting the loss of the election as expected by the misogynistic, racist, homophobic, xenophobic President-elect. These were all attempts to rhetorically refuse to accept the loss of the election. Further, these were moments when citizens were refusing the authority of the power structures—in this case the electoral system—that were expecting citizens to accept the results of the election. Beyond these outright refusals of the loss, queer grief allows for smaller refusals of acceptance by highlighting the uses of “willingly,” “with favor,” “partiality,” and “favoritism” in the definition of “accept” (“Accept, v.”). This broadened definition of a refusal to willingly or happily accept a loss account for smaller, more quotidian enactments of queer grief and, by extension, resistance. For instance, when a female-bodied person is walking down the street and she gets catcalled, she is expected to show delight that the patriarchy (the men catcalling her) deems her attractive and worthy of attention, but when she doesn’t acknowledge the advances, she is not accepting the loss of her subjectivity, privacy, and autonomy “with favor.” The same is true with the hoodies worn as protest the extrajudicial killing of an innocent teenager; people who wore the garments were unwilling to accept the

racist ideology that motivates the targeting of Black and brown bodies. Finally, in refusing the inadequacy of a sex education in America, part-time volunteers hand out leaflets on the mortality rates of Sexually Transmitted Diseases to bring awareness to the lack of research and funding for those diseases and their cures. In not willingly or favorably accepting these losses of life and subjectivity, queer grief is able to be deployed in a large-scale social movement as well as a small-scale interaction of everyday life.

This chapter examines applications of queer grief to highlight the rhetorical and cultural powers of deploying this affective state *in* and *as* social movements. Like Achille Mbembé, I focus on the ways certain populations are rendered ungrievable. This means I focus on “those figures of sovereignty whose central project is not the struggle for autonomy but *the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations*” (14, emphasis in original). By interrogating the power structures—whether it be governmental or extrajudicial—that target the “destruction of persons and the creation of *death-worlds*, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*” (Mbembé 40, emphasis in original), I am interested in how necropolitics and necropower mark populations as expendable. First looking to the recent past, I will situate the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power’s (ACT UP) best-known actions as being squarely centered in queer grief as a refusal to accept the ways in which People with AIDS (PWA) were dying at the hands of government inaction and rampant homophobia. Then, I will transition to the more contemporary Black Lives Matter movement that queerly grieves the loss of numerous Black Americans at the hands of

police officers and the loss of (the illusion of) equality (and humanity) in American culture. These two movements will show the ways in which queer grief not only acts as a mobilizing force for social movements, but also accounts for the various affects and affective states social movements like ACT UP and Black Lives Matter create, embrace, and transmit. Finally, the implications for this argument focus on the rhetorical loss of personhood and refusal to accept that loss. Through the refusal to accept their expendability, ACT UP members affected major social and political change regarding the AIDS crisis. Conversely, Black Lives Matter is born into a lineage of repeated loss, but their actions are animated by the refusal to accept the rhetorical loss of their personhood.

### **ACT UP: Queer Grief as Inciting Anger and Militancy**

The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) was founded in early 1987 in response to the gross mishandling of the AIDS crisis and epidemic raging throughout the queer—more predominantly gay male—community in the United States. From the experiences of federal, state, and private healthcare services failing to help or aid in the fight against the mysterious “gay cancer” raging throughout the nation and world (Gould, *Moving Politics*), ACT UP felt as though they “c[ould] do much, much more” (ACT UP New York, *Original Working Document*). The plan to effect change was simple: “[W]e’ll have 600 *angry* people at our next demonstration, not 300. and the demonstration after that will have 1200 people. As our numbers grow, our power will grow” (Ibid., emphasis added). This emphasis on having *angry* people is often the focus of scholarship on ACT UP (See: Gould, *Moving Politics*; Gould, “Life During Wartime”;



Hager; Juhasz; Gingrich-Philbrook); but what is lost when this scholarship *only* focuses on the anger of ACT UP? The scholarship on ACT UP is no doubt inflected by the organization's mission statement, which is "ACT UP is a diverse, non-partisan group of individuals *united in anger* and committed to direct action to end the AIDS crisis. We advise and inform. We demonstrate. WE ARE NOT SILENT" (ACT UP New York, "NYC Info," emphasis mine). Regardless of the productivity of such scholarship, I want to look at what is left behind when we *only* consider ACT UP through anger. The potentiality of other affects, such as grief, in the organization and movement are overlooked when scholars solely focus on anger. By shifting my focus, I find that rather than conforming to the prescribed way of coping with the AIDS-related deaths by ignoring them or treating them as a natural consequence of homosexuality, ACT UP members reacted with a queer grief that *colored* the anger and militancy the group was known for.

To uncover the potentialities of grief, I am mining the "rhetorical construction of the affective history of ACT UP" (Rand, "Gay Pride and Its Queer Discontents" 78). Other scholars have turned to these affective histories to uncover new possibilities of looking at the organization. Deborah Gould notes the importance of mining these affective histories, because it allows scholars "to get a better idea of affect" (Gould, *Moving Politics* 20). She writes:

[C]onsider how we often experience our feelings as opaque to ourselves, as something that we do not quite have language for, something that we cannot fully grasp, something that escapes us but is nevertheless in play, generated through interaction with the world, and affecting our embodied beings and subsequent actions. I call that bodily, sensory, inarticulate, nonconscious experience affect. (Ibid.)

Because affect is so slippery and defiant of crystallization, it becomes hard to “nail down,” especially in the moment of experiencing the affect. These inchoate intensities are sometimes hard for us to grasp, whether it be due to their “noncognitive, nonconscious, nonlinguistic, and nonrational” facets or our own need to *not* feel them immediately.

The main source of the affective history I am excavating is The ACT UP Oral History project, started in 2002 by Sarah Schulman and Jim Hubbard. The ACT UP Oral History Project “is a collection of interviews with surviving members of the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, New York” that “reveal what has motivated them to action and how they have organized complex endeavors” (“About”). Specifically, I am culling the interviews that explore the affective states at play at the start of and throughout ACT UP. In his ACT UP Oral History Project interview, Eric Rhein says: “[T]he anger that I perceive, even though I know that my experience of—when I did experience the rooms at ACT UP; saw the conversations and the joy and the camaraderie, the anger and the trauma and the grief are something that I’m arguably much more in touch with *now* than I allowed myself *then*” (Rhein 32, emphases mine). Rhein’s distinction about what he felt while participating in ACT UP versus what he felt looking back points to the very potentiality of affect that makes it attractive and fruitful for scholars to study. Because affect is so resistant to language and capture, it is short-sighted to not account for the changes in affect that can happen over time or to assume that affects once experienced cannot be re-experienced when looking back. As Scott Wald notes, “It was absolutely, it was like a tsunami of feeling every day. It was amazing” (42). The depth and breadth of

this “tsunami” cannot be understated.

Although the group didn’t truly disband and a few chapters are still active (“About”), many consider the movement to be in the past, citing “The Split”<sup>8</sup> as why the movement is no longer (as) active. The queer grief exhibited by the members of ACT UP who refuse to accept the loss of the organization is interesting in its own right (and is explored in the conclusion of this chapter), but as mentioned before, the emphasis of the chapter is on the use of queer grief in the heyday of ACT UP and the way it motivated many of their demonstrations, actions, and protests. Utilizing the interviews from the ACT UP Oral History Project, I find the affective investments of the group as they fought AIDS-based discrimination by focusing on the demonstrations that yielded the largest social change and/or were described in the most sensational terms. I also examine other pertinent artifacts, like posters by ACT UP and news articles and images from the most e/affective demonstrations, from the New York Public Library Archives Digital Collections and ACT UP New York’s still-active website, which houses a document archive. Together, the artifacts from these archives start uncovering ACT UP’s grief archive. The Oral History Project website says, “We hope that this information will demystify the process of making social change, remind us that change can be made, and help us understand how to do it” (“About”); it is the goal of this paper to show how queer grief “helps us understand how” social movements can flourish.

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<sup>8</sup> “The Split” refers to when the Treatment and Data Group left ACT UP/NY to form the Treatment Action Group (TAG). For more, see: Larry Kramer and Mark Harrington’s ACT UP Oral History Project Interviews.

*Starting with a Bang: Stop the Church of 1989*

ACT UP's most (in)famous action was the demonstration at the St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City in December of 1989—more commonly known as “Stop the Church.” When Cardinal John O'Connor decided to oppose the comprehensive sex education in public schools that ACT UP saw as vital to fighting the AIDS crisis (Carroll), ACT UP decided to zap the church with demonstrations outside as well as inside (Northrop 28–29). While some protestors were disrupting the service inside, demonstrators outside



*Figure 2: Banner at Stop the Church demonstration*

were passing out leaflets on the benefits of condoms as well as holding a giant banner marked “Cardinal O’Condom” (Figure 2). According to ACT UP, “the message we send to the Catholic hierarchy is simple: curb your dogmatic crusade against the truth: condoms and safer-sex information save lives ... the lives of children and young people!” (ACT UP New York, “Stop the Church Action 10 Year Anniversary Action”). The silence surrounding sexual education in US public schools was seen, to ACT UP and many others, to be a promotion of death; moreover, since HIV/AIDS was seen as a solely queer or gay male issue (as was evidenced by the original names of HIV/AIDS: “gay cancer,” Gay-Related Immune Deficiency [GRID], etc.), the death that was being promoted and condoned was that of queers. Thus, in ACT UP’s rhetorical refusal to accept the impending death of queer America, they mobilized their queer grief into spreading

awareness.

Part of what made Stop the Church so galvanizing was what happened during the demonstration. In his Oral History Project interview, Victor Mendolia recalls the reactive nature of the demonstration, saying:

I remember specifically; the impetus was that O'Connor, Cardinal O'Connor had been meddling in the public schools, and lobbying against two things: the Children of the Rainbow curriculum, which was about to be implemented, which was basically trying to teach kids about differences, and tolerance of different communities, including the gay community. And also, there was the issue of condom distribution in schools. ... And I said, if he's going to go meddling in the public schools, then we should just shut down his cash machine, and close the church down. So that's how it came about. (16–17)

There may have been consensus about why ACT UP should demonstrate against the church, but there was debate about whether or not the demonstration should cross the threshold of the church. Explaining the original plan and what it became, Mendolia says, “The official plan was just to do a picket outside,” but eventually, “it became clear that people were going to do something on the inside anyway,” so the organization urged people to only disrupt the service “during the homily, which is the non-sacred part of the mass. It's where the priest or the bishop or the cardinal says his own opinion to the congregation. So it's not classified as part of the sacred liturgy” (17). However, a couple members of ACT UP went rogue and disrupted the communion. Tom Keane garnered massive public attention when he crushed a communion wafer and dropped it on the floor. Recalling the moment, Keane says:

I hadn't premeditated like I was going to take the host or toss it or whatever, but eighteen years of going to church, I'm there, I put my hands

out, and suddenly I have the Communion wafer in my hands, and the priest says, “This is the body of Christ,” and I say, “Opposing safe-sex education is murder.” Then I sort of—I didn’t really know what to do, and I think in some sense, some part of me was sort of saying, “Well, fine. You guys think you can tell us that you reject us, that we don’t belong, so I’m going to reject you.” So I took it and I crushed it and dropped it. Didn’t spit it out. That was all over the papers that—I think afterward, like six or seven people they said had, like, spit the Communion wafer out. (20–21)

This rejection that Keane articulates is the basis of the queer grief the organization mobilized: Rather than continuing with business as usual in denying the importance of safe sex practices, ACT UP rebelled by refusing to accept the loss of comprehensive safe-sex education while also mourning the loss of their own sexual practices.

Before the AIDS epidemic, queer sexual practices were largely unregulated within the gay community. Many of the ACT UP Oral History Project interviews mentioned the loss of a certain care-free attitude that accompanied gay sex *before* the AIDS epidemic. In discussing the loss surrounding the sexual culture *after* the AIDS epidemic, Douglas Crimp writes:

When, in mourning our ideal, we meet with the same opprobrium as when mourning our dead, we incur a different order of psychic distress, since the memories of our pleasures are already fraught with ambivalence. The abject repudiation of their sexual pasts by many gay men testifies to that ambivalence, even as the widespread adoption of safe sex practices vouches for our ability to work through it. Perhaps we may even think of safe sex as the substitute libido-position that beckoned to us as we mourned our lost sexual ideal. (11)

The ambivalence Crimp notes as coloring the (sexual) pleasure of life before the AIDS crisis marks what made queer sexual practices exciting. There was a detachment within the intimacy; people didn’t have to know one another to have sex; encounters were

casual, anonymous, affecting. However, the AIDS crisis changed that, the detachment was no longer *within* the intimacy, but people were distancing themselves *from* the intimacy, denying their sexual pasts due to the fear and precarity that AIDS added to sexual encounters. After AIDS, Crimp notes that safe sex practices allowed gay males a way through the grief, and while he might have meant the statement literally—condoms allowed gay males to have sex with a lessened fear of contracting HIV—when taken up with Stop the Church, another side of the quote is revealed. To feel the same rush that casual, anonymous sex used to provide the gay men of ACT UP, they turned to protesting.<sup>9</sup> The protesting involved safe sex practices at Stop the Church, thus the men of ACT UP used “safe sex [protests] as the substitute libido-position that beckoned to [them] as [they] mourned [their] lost sexual ideal” (Crimp 11). Instead of a funeral, ACT UP held a protest to mourn their losses.

### *Having a (Political) Funeral: Ashes Action of 1992*

Another one of ACT UP’s major actions was the Ashes Action of 1992, which was planned to be a large-scale political funeral to get then-President George H. W. Bush’s attention. David Wojnarowicz describes political funerals as an avenue “To turn our private grief for the loss of friends, family, lovers and strangers into something public would serve as another powerful dismantling tool” that has the power to “dispel the notion that this virus has a sexual orientation or a moral code ... [and to] nullify the

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<sup>9</sup> Many of the ACT UP Oral History Project interviews point to the affectively charged nature of the protest and use libidinally-charged language to describe the actions, but Eric Rhein and Scott Wald’s interviews are the most focused on the affect of the protests.

belief that the government and medical community has [sic] done very much to ease the spread or advancement of this disease” (qtd. in ACT UP New York, “Political Funerals”). Often, these political funerals involve “carr[ying] fake coffins and mock tombstones, and splatter[ing] red paint to represent someone's HIV-positive blood, perhaps your own” (ACT UP New York, “Ashes Action ’92”); however, these funerals didn’t accomplish enough in the eyes of ACT UP. A flyer that circulated to promote the action (Figure 3) describes the room for improvement of political funerals.<sup>10</sup> It reads, “You have lost someone to AIDS. For more than a decade, your government has mocked your loss ... George [H. W.] Bush believes that the White House gates shield him, from you, your loss, and his responsibility for the AIDS crisis. Now it is time to bring AIDS home to George [H. W.] Bush.” (Ibid.). The action involved starting at the NAMES Project AIDS Quilt display on the National Mall<sup>11</sup> and walking to the White House

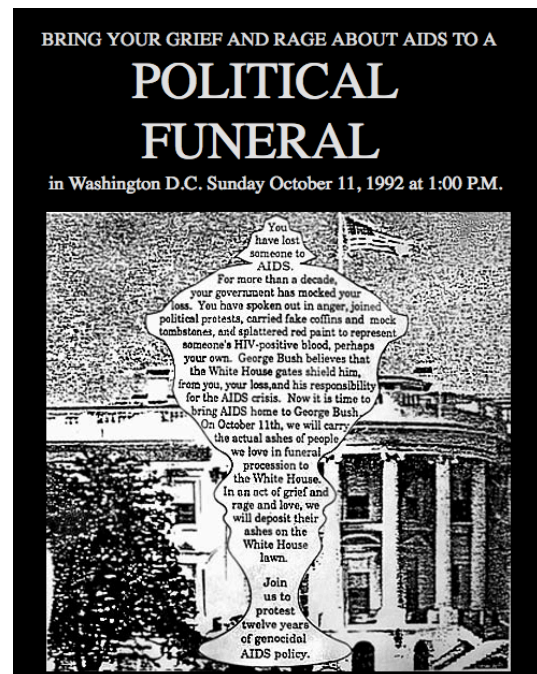


Figure 3: Ashes Action Flyer from ACT UP NY’s website

<sup>10</sup> The full text of the flyer is as follows: “You have lost someone to AIDS. For more than a decade, your government has mocked your loss. You have spoken out in anger, joined political protests, carried fake coffins and mock tombstones, and splattered red paint to represent someone's HIV-positive blood, perhaps your own. George Bush believes that the White House gates shield him, from you, your loss, and his responsibility for the AIDS crisis. Now it is time to bring AIDS home to George Bush. On October 11th, we will carry the actual ashes of people we love in funeral procession to the White House. In an act of grief and rage and love, we will deposit their ashes on the White House lawn. Join us to protest twelve years of genocidal AIDS policy.”

<sup>11</sup> For more critical insight on the AIDS quilt, see: *Remembering the AIDS Quilt* edited by Charles E. Morris, III. This movement is interesting for its own deployment of queer grief rooted in much of the same refusal to accept the loss of individuals with AIDS as ACT UP, but I would argue this movement was eventually co-opted and seen as an acceptable form of grief when the quilt was used for more memorializing means rather than activist/resistant means. Once the quilt lost its confrontational nature, it became less queer in its grieving. Robinson also gestures toward this co-optation of the quilt in his ACT UP Oral History Project interview.



lawn, led by “the people who actually had ashes — some had little urns; some just had a little plastic bag, a little baggie, literally. ... So there were about, I think, 15 of us with ashes” (Ibid). When the protestors got to the lawn, they “threw the ashes, dumped the ashes, threw the urns, whatever. People say depo-, it wasn’t depositing the ashes. It was – people were screaming – and crying,” with the goal of “show[ing] what have really been the consequences of [George H. W. Bush’s] administration’s, and [Ronald Reagan’s administration’s] action” (Ibid). This direct action against the government that was oppressing people with and suppressing information about HIV/AIDS demonstrates the queer grief the group mobilized and what makes queer grief impactful in social change.

If ACT UP members had remained within the structured feelings of grief, then their funerals would have been private and the NAMES Project quilt panels would have stayed on beds. That is, because People with AIDS (PWA) and their allies made AIDS-related deaths political and public, they refused to let the institutionalized homophobia dictate their expendability. Esther Kaplan recalls that the Ashes Action came during the “period of time in ’92, ’93, [that] was some of the worst years of the epidemic” (22). As a response, activists began to “use their actual corpses or plan that their own corpses would be used politically” (Ibid). The publicness and visibility of these corpses violated how the government and most of the United States wanted to suppress and look away from the AIDS crisis. ACT UP’s confrontational tactics often made a point to (re)iterate the deathly consequences of the AIDS crisis. Because the AIDS crisis was so abstract to many people (i.e. they didn’t know someone with HIV/AIDS), the use of a corpse from an AIDS-related death makes the crisis concrete—it literally shows the toll the disease

can take.

The NAMES Project Quilt operates in a similar manner, but instead of making the deaths concrete, the AIDS Quilt shows the breadth of the disease. The AIDS Quilt is constructed of panels that are three feet by six feet—roughly the same size as a cemetery plot—and decorated by family members, friends, or groups in honor of someone who died from HIV/AIDS (Morris III, *Remembering the AIDS Quilt*). When the AIDS Quilt was first displayed on the National Mall, it allowed viewers to *see* only a portion of the lives claimed by the AIDS crisis, again giving a concreteness to the epidemic for those not directly affected by it. This publicity of HIV/AIDS and those lost to the disease violated the privacy and secrecy homophobic cultural practices and policies deemed appropriate responses to AIDS-related deaths; by making the deaths and governmental inaction public knowledge, ACT UP politically charged and queered their grief by defying what was expected.

Through making AIDS-related deaths public, ACT UP was able to refuse to accept the terms of the AIDS crisis. The reason pointing out death or loss—especially politically-charged deaths and losses—is affective is because death and loss impinge upon our normalcy and expectations. In our death-denying culture, learning about a death impinges upon our norm, leaving us affected (Gregg and Seigworth 2–4), which Gould connects to us being predisposed to uprising or rebellion (*Moving Politics* 2–3). Through their ability to mobilize and further politically charge queer grief, ACT UP was able to effect change during the AIDS crisis that revolutionized the medicine, laws, and perceptions of the disease and those living with it.

*Involving Kids: "If You Fuck Without a Condom" of 1996*

The main way ACT UP combated the silence and ignorance surrounding the AIDS crisis was by distributing information through leaflets, posters, demonstrations, and more. Each of these avenues of disseminating information displays a level of queer grief that is grounded in rhetorically refusing to accept and conform to the silence surrounding the death and suffering caused by the AIDS crisis. In the Original Working Document, ACT UP/NY notes, "Each [member] became involved with ACT UP because of frustration and anger with the U.S. government and its lack of interest and leadership in the AIDS crisis." ACT UP was

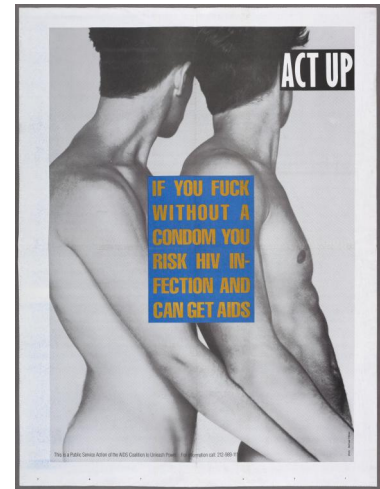


Figure 4: "If you fuck without a condom" poster from the New York Public Library Digital Collections

loud—as referenced in Rhein’s recollection of the Ashes Action—to bring attention to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, but the national government wanted to remain quiet and defer to other institutions to decide how to handle the AIDS crisis. For instance, contraceptives—specifically condoms—are the best way (outside of abstinence) to prevent contracting the HIV virus.

Another (in)famous action by ACT UP was a demonstration where members of the ACT UP Seattle chapter distributed pamphlets entitled “How to Fuck Safely” to local high schoolers to help teach the teenagers what the local school system was not (Staff Reporter). Other chapters, like Los Angeles, did similar actions as well (Sands and Eng), whereas ACT UP/NY circulated posters like the one featured in Figure 4 (ACT UP New

York, *If You [F\*\*k] without a Condom You Risk HIV Infection and Can Get AIDS*). These demonstrations lead to an uproar of criticism for the organization as “it was wrong to give contraceptives to students without the permission of parents” (Hammersley and Davis; See also: Allen et al.; S. Harris; Barbanel).

The exchange between the activists and students is interesting through the lens of queer grief for two reasons. First, the activists are not only refusing to accept the loss of comprehensive sexual education in schools, but are also refusing to accept the loss of *the students* to the lack of comprehensive sexual education. By handing out information to the (uninformed) students who are most likely already engaging in sexual acts, ACT UP is *preempting* the possibility of these students falling victim to HIV/AIDS. This rhetorical maneuver refuses to accept the impending loss of these students to HIV/AIDS should they not be exposed to safe sex education.

Second, this exchange emphasizes an interesting meeting of two forms of queer grief. On the one hand, ACT UP is refusing to accept the possible loss of these students to HIV/AIDS, and on the other hand, the parents and school faculty who raised concerns over the students being exposed to this information were queerly grieving the students’ loss of innocence by admitting they were having sex and needed a comprehensive sexual education program. In “The Future Is Kid Stuff: Queer Theory, Disidentification, and the Death Drive,” Lee Edelman argues that queer individuals are not privileged to have a “future” since queerness is so closely linked to death—especially in the time of the AIDS crisis—and that children are the recipients of this futurity due to the rigor of protection afforded to children’s innocence (18–19). Since children are not seen as sexual beings in

American culture and are therefore required to be shielded from sexuality—especially queer sexuality, which is seen as excessive, flamboyant, and promiscuous (Rodriguez 30–32)—the parents (and to a lesser extent, the school faculty) are refusing to accept the loss of their children’s innocence.

In the ACT UP Oral History Interviews, many members of ACT UP recount how demonstrations like Stop the Church, Political Funerals, and How to Fuck Safely place the organization in tension with law enforcement. From recounting their multiple arrests to their training on how to civilly resist arrest to their narrow misses of arrest, there’s a sense of pride in how ACT UP was able to express their queer grief. This, in no small part, is due to the group’s overwhelming whiteness. In “Whiteness as Property,” Cheryl Harris argues that in the United States, whiteness is a form of property and therefore confers “all of those human rights, liberties, powers, and immunities that are important for human well-being, including: freedom of expression, freedom of conscience, freedom from bodily harm, and free and equal opportunities to use personal faculties” (Underkuffler qtd. in C. I. Harris 1726). Because ACT UP was predominantly white and male (Northrop; Kaplan), they were afforded the ability to interrupt church services, vandalize the White House lawn, and distribute graphic leaflets on safe sex education as a means of refusing to accept the loss of PWAs to the homophobic inaction on behalf of the government. Further, they were able to do all these actions *while only being arrested*. In what follows, I examine the queer grief of Black Lives Matter, but I want to take a moment to hold up ACT UP and Black Lives Matter side-by-side, to show the disparity between the privileges afforded to ACT UP and its members. There are multiple reports

of Black (Lives Matter) protestors being harmed while protesting rather than simply being arrested like their white/ACT UP counterparts (See: Conservative Outfitters; O. Smith; C.B.S. News). Brittney C. Cooper writes, “Blackness always looks suspicious. Whiteness always looks safe” (“Re-Nigging on the Promises: #Justice4Trayvon” 62). Thus, even when ACT UP was at its height of militancy and anger, the whiteness of the group provided the possibility of *only* being arrested. Had ACT UP been a mostly Black group, the actions taken by the police to quell protests and demonstrations might have looked more like the vicious attacks, maullings, and murders of Black protestors dating back to slavery and still lasting today.

### **Black Lives Matter: Queer Grief and the Racialized Body**

State violence against Americans of color, specifically Black Americans, is well documented throughout history. From the Zoot Suit Riots targeting perceived extravagance during wartime to the Rodney King Riots depicting mass-publicized police brutality (Pagan; Katz), Americans of color have been the main target of the United States’ government and police force.

Figure 6 shows a group named “Women in Mourning and Outrage” protesting the death of Amadou Diallo at the hands of police officers (Manning). This group seems to have only held two demonstrations that



*Figure 5: Women in Mourning and Outrage protesting outside the United Nations in 2000*

caught the attention of the media in 2000 and 2001 (C. L. Cooper; Fusco), but they are rooted in the same queer grief that drives Black Lives Matter. Where Women in Mourning and Outrage refused to accept the death of Diallo, who was shot forty-one times (Manning), Black Lives Matter started through a refusal to accept the death of Trayvon Martin, a Black teen who was killed at the hands of a neighborhood watchperson, and was able to gain national attention and momentum through their continued refusal to accept the loss of the Black (male) Americans who were victims of police brutality (Garza).

By applying *queer grief* to Black Lives Matter, I aim to add to a recent turn in scholarship that offers modalities of critique that bridge the gap between critical race theory/studies and queer theory/studies. Even though marginality is shared by non-white and queer individuals, there has been a “paucity of attention given to race and class in queer studies” that neglects the material conditions of being both non-white and queer (E. P. Johnson 1). In the late 1980s, Gloria Anzaldúa published *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* which broke many conventions of scholarly writing by featuring poetry, portions of the book written in a dialect of Spanish, and graphic queer sex scenes; and, Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga later published the collection *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* that featured queer and non-queer writers of various races. Both of these books center the embodied experience of race as it relates to queerness and womanhood, which disrupted the white male norm of queer theory. Later, José Esteban Muñoz wrote *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, which theorizes how queers of color are able to navigate their

precarity as both queer and brown by refusing to live within the confines of certain identity markers. Most recently, E. Patrick Johnson offers the idea of *quare*, which is “a vernacular rearticulation and deployment of queer theory to accommodate racialized sexual knowledge” (1). Each of these additions urges queer theory to be more attendant to the embodied practices, embodied ways of being, and embodied knowledge that comes with being a (queer) person of color. Since both non-white and queer populations have been seen as expendable and targets of necropolitical institutions and policies, it is important to consider how not just queer populations but also non-white populations are precluded from being able to grieve their losses and how queer grief animates the actions of activists of color.

In 2013, on what is commonly known as “Black Twitter,” the discursive enclave created by Black American users on the social networking site, Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrisse Cullors started the hashtag “#BlackLivesMatter” (Jones; Garza). For Garza, the hashtag (and movement that came from the hashtag) “is an affirmation of Black folks’ contributions to this society, our humanity, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression.” Through their emphasis on the contributions of Black Americans *in spite of* the deadly oppression they face, Black Lives Matter functions not only as a social movement but as an outcry of rhetorical queer grief since the systemic racism Black Americans face would have people believe Black lives *don’t* matter. This queer grief is rhetorical not only in how it opens discursive space for Black Americans to voice dissent from the institutionalized and systemic racism of the United States but also in the fact that by uttering “Black Lives Matter,” protestors are exerting their agency to refuse the



loss of Black Americans on the terms of extrajudicial murder. Through their insistence that *Black* lives matter—even though the movement has been co-opted many times over through counter-movements such as “All Lives Matter” and “Blue Lives Matter” (Garza)—is a refusal to accept the loss of Black Americans in general as well as being a refusal to accept those losses on the terms of necropolitical, racist policies and institutions. By harnessing the queer grief many Black Americans were feeling, Garza, Cullors, and Tometi were able to turn a hashtag into an organization.

Rather than mining the affective history, as was done above, this section of the paper focuses on adding to the fledgling affective history surrounding Black Lives Matter. Building off the work of scholars such as Michelle Smith, who looks at the intersections of affect and respectability politics as it relates to the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson; Stephanie Hartzell, who interrogates the disidentifications performed around the death of Trayvon Martin; Aimee Carrillo Rowe and Franchesca T. Royster, who highlight the importance of affect and queerness in causing social change; and, the scholars involved in the *Trans\* Studies Quarterly Journal's* roundtable discussion of the importance of “the (re)configuration of trans\* political economy toward liberatory, antiracist, decolonial, and economically transformative ends” (Irving et al. 16), I assemble an affective history of the Black Lives Matter organization and movement. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, Sara Ahmed notes the importance of attending to the past and affective histories. She writes:

Affective histories include the histories of what or who is allowed close enough to this or that body for this or that body to be affected in the first place ... Gentrification could be described in these terms: the gradual

removal of ‘eye-sores’ (people and things) in order that those who reside in these spaces are not negatively affected by them; such that they do not have to encounter what would get in the way of the happiness of their occupation. (Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 232–233)

In the case of Black Lives Matter, assembling the affective history—as it is told by the organization itself and those participating in the movement—looks at the racist, necropolitical power structures, such as the prison-industrial complex and school-to-prison pipeline, that negatively affect (and take) the lives of Black and brown individuals.

As was mentioned in the Introduction of this thesis, building an affective history or archive for Black Lives Matter is difficult. Unlike ACT UP, which has its own archives and the Oral History Project, Black Lives Matter cannot yet be viewed in hindsight. While the individual events examined below are in the past temporally, Black Lives Matter is still attempting to effect change to help prevent more extrajudicial killings of Black Americans; therefore, any recollection of the events that spawned the organization and movement are affected by 1) the continued involvement with the organization—whereas most all of the interviewees of the ACT UP Oral History Project are no longer involved with the group—and 2) the continued killings and oppression of Black Americans. That said, by focusing on the events of Trayvon Martin’s and Michael Brown’s murders and what was said about them at the time, I hope to begin to build the affective history of Black Lives Matter. By relying on the voices of Black Lives Matter’s founders and those participating in the movement, this affective history helps to preempt the co-optation and/or erasure of these marginal narratives by the mainstream. Resisting this co-

optation while beginning the grief archive of Black Lives Matter presents an exercise in the critical reflexivity needed in using affect as a method. Although I am “pricked” by the artifacts of this section in extreme ways, I am cognizant of the fact that I am pricked in a vastly different and lesser way than a person of color would be. Therefore, it is imperative (not only to me but to the project itself) that an affective history as it is told *through* and *by* the movement and its constituents be established to prevent further erasure and co-optation of these narratives due to the Black Lives Matter mantra already being aggressively taken over by the mainstream (See: Damiani; Townes; Victor; Lennard; “Our Mission”). In valuing the affective history as it is told by the people of color in the movement over artifacts produced from outside the movement, I aim to resist adopting a “color-blind” approach to these artifacts, resist neglecting the lineage of rampant racial oppression faced by Black Americans, and resist white-washing the sources of information in this section. This reflexivity is important (especially for white academics) in order to avoid what Garza notes is a long line of co-opting “the strategies, tactics and theory of the Black liberation movement” by other movements.

### *Trayvon Martin: The Start*

With the long-standing and well-documented racism of American culture, it seems odd to say Trayvon Martin was the *start* of something. Martin was the recipient of a fatal inheritance (his skin color) and a beneficiary of a legacy (the criminalization of raced bodies), both of which predate and, unfortunately, outlive his short life. However, Martin was the *start* of something; his death “spark[ed] . . . one of the first sustained

social justice movements of the twenty-first century, the Movement for Black Lives” (Lindsey, “5 Years After His Death, Trayvon Martin Still Impacts the Future of #BlackLivesMatter”). Three years after his death, various organizations fighting racial injustice came together in 2015 to become the Movement for Black Lives and published a manifesto—something that had been missing from the Black Lives Matter campaign since its beginning. Due to Black Lives Matter being formed before Movement for Black Lives and having started as a discursive dissent from racist practices, Black Lives Matter proves to be a richer rhetorical expression of queer grief from which to draw on—a queer grief over Trayvon Martin’s death.

In the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter, Garza, Tometi, and Cullors mobilized the queer grief being experienced by the Black community at the time of Martin’s death. Through the killer’s lack of remorse and the jury’s acquittal of the killer, Black America was shown the deeply-rooted institutionalized racism of the United States that did not share the sentiment that “Black lives matter.” In the eyes of racist Americans, Martin was a “thug” or “hoodlum” (Atkins; Greer; Lindsey, “5 Years After His Death, Trayvon Martin Still Impacts the Future of #BlackLivesMatter”; Weinstein and MoJo News Team), and due to this characterization, his death was seen as “justified” and should be mourned no differently than any other “criminal[’s]” (Ford). In fact, necropolitical policies and laws like “Stand Your Ground” were aimed at letting the death to pass un-mourned completely, as was evidenced by the increase of “justifiable homicide” claims over killing Black Americans (Prince). However, the rhetorical strategies of #BlackLivesMatter on Black Twitter created a discursive space in which the queer grievers could assert their

refusal to accept the terms upon which Trayvon's life was lost. Not only were the queer grieverers who adopted the hashtag refusing to accept the loss of Martin on the terms given to them (Demby), but they were also repudiating the



*Figure 6: New Yorkers hold a prayer service for Martin*

“unchanging reality of blackness being synonymous with criminality” in America (Lindsey, “5 Years After His Death, Trayvon Martin Still Impacts the Future of #BlackLivesMatter”). While the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter was used only “48 times a day” on Twitter before the death of Mike Brown (Demby), the emblematic hoodie that marked Martin as deviant was widely adopted, spurning movements of solidarity standing with Martin began. In Figure 6, churchgoers in New York are holding a prayer service for Martin while wearing versions of the hoodie that marked him as criminal (read: too Black) (“Photos: Reaction to the Verdict”).

I argue that Martin's hoodie operated as what Caitlin Bruce calls an “affect generator.” Like the balaclavas donned by Pussy Riot in their infamous “Punk Prayer” demonstration at the altar of the Christ the Savior Cathedral in Moscow, Martin's hoodie became a “supercharged image that enables multiple claims and performances of solidarity and identification to take place” (Bruce 45). Through donning the hoodie that rhetorically functioned as a death sentence for Martin, these churchgoers are refusing to accept the loss of personhood due to attire. The hood has long been marked as a sign of

death (e.g. the executioner's hood, the hoods worn by the KKK, etc.), but with the criminalization of the hoodie, individuals were able to rally around the "supercharged image" of the hoodie to stand in solidarity against the racist oppression that killed Martin. In "Necropolitics and Black Boyhood from Emmett Till to Tamir Rice," Lisa Corrigan argues that the ability of the hoodie to obscure the wearer's face and its ties to Blackness is what gives it the hoodie its lethal ability to prevent identification with the wearer. However, I would challenge that assertion by noting that the anonymity of the hoodie is what gives it affective potential. As with the balaclavas worn by Pussy Riot, a hoodie obscures the wearer's face so that they could be anyone, and therefore allows for identification with those in solidarity with the wearer, bringing more attention to the atrocity that has been perpetrated.

By devoting *any* attention to the loss of a Black male, Black Lives Matter contradicts what the racist, necropolitical power structure deems appropriate. According to Ta-Nehisi Coates, the death of Martin and the acquittal of Zimmerman was a machination of the necropolitical policies of the United States. He writes, "The injustice inherent in the killing of Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman was ... authored by a country which has taken as its policy ... to erect a pariah class. The killing of Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman is not an error in programming. It is the correct result of forces we set in motion years ago and have done very little to arrest" (Coates). Because the United States has consistently used its sovereignty to create "death worlds" around Blacks, Trayvon Martin's death wasn't an anomaly, it was an inevitability. In the death worlds created by racist policies and practices such as "Stand Your Ground" statutes and

broken-windows policing, Black deaths *ought not* be mourned because they are seen as expendable. However, by grieving *and* mourning (that is, internally grieving and externally mourning) the loss of Trayvon Martin, Black Lives Matter activists were refusing to accept the loss on the terms of the necropolitical racism that would prefer the death passed unnoticed. Elucidating the expected silence surrounding Black death, Treva B. Lindsey notes the “long history of non-Black perpetrators not being held accountable for crimes against Black people” when she mentions the facile connections made between the Emmett Till lynching with the death of Trayvon Martin. These prolific murders and their affective potential to galvanize people “became catalysts in battles for social change. [Till and Martin] were and are symbolic, substantive forces propelling new chapters of the long black freedom struggle in the U.S.” (Lindsey, “5 Years After His Death, Trayvon Martin Still Impacts the Future of #BlackLivesMatter”). When Mamie Till insisted on a public, open-casket funeral for her son, she was able to literally broadcast the murderous effects of racism as well as violate the silence of how Black death *ought* to be grieved. Adopting this same queer grief that loudly refuses the terms of Black death in America, Sybrina Fulton joined the chorus proclaiming, “Black Lives Matter” as she insisted that her son was not the “thug” and “hoodlum” the media painted her son to be and therefore did not deserve to be killed at the hands of George Zimmerman.

### *Ferguson: The Uprising*

Two years after the death of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown was shot to death by a police officer, Darren Wilson, in Ferguson, Missouri. In what Brittney Cooper calls a “nightmarish” scene, Brown’s lifeless body “was then left uncovered on Canfield Drive—

in public view of family and neighbors.” The “critical moment in contemporary United States history” sparked a local and national uprising under the rallying cry of “Black Lives Matter” (B. Cooper, “Ferguson, 1 Year Later”). In



Figure 7: Residents of Ferguson confront police after Brown killing

Figure 7, residents of Ferguson confront the police department after news of Brown’s killing circulated (Sangweni). This photograph is salient to the discussion of queer grief due to its clear juxtaposition of the emotion of the residents of Ferguson with the (lack of) emotion of the police officers. While this image looks indicative of many other images of protest, with animated, affected protestors in opposition to stoic, unaffected police officers, the context of this image is what makes it an incitement of queer grief. The police officers present what grief over Brown’s killing *ought* to look like, they are seemingly unaffected. If the protestors are cropped out of the picture, the officers appear to be looking at an ordinary crime scene, staying within the structured feelings of how they *ought* to behave. The protestors on the other hand show the queer side of grief. They impinge upon the police officers and the photograph; their affective display points to the fact something has affected them. Since the racist policing practices of the Ferguson Police department would have residents believe Brown’s death didn’t matter—that he was a criminal and therefore disposable—by protesting and confronting the



police in this picture, the residents of Ferguson refused to believe Michael Brown was as disposable as Darren Wilson and the necropower of the military-industrial complex thought he was.

In a military-industrial complex, the conditioned response to police officers is subservient respect, which Wilson makes clear in his Grand Jury testimony. Wilson testified that he asked Brown and his friend to move from the middle of the road onto the sidewalk, to which, “Brown then replied, ‘fuck what you have to say.’ ... It was a very unusual and not expected response from a simple request” (208–209). In recounting his version of events, Wilson points to the subservient respect that is expected by police; however, both Brown and the individuals in Figure 7 refused to accept the loss of their ability to confront the police officers. The group of residents on the left of the image appear angry, but it is the two individuals just left of center in the photograph that appear to be the most affected. The person in a patterned hat, white t-shirt, grey sweatpants, and black sandals, and the person just over their right shoulder in a white t-shirt, black pants, carrying a plastic cup with a green lid both seem to be gesturing and yelling at the police officers. By yelling, pointing, and glaring at the officers, the residents pictured above are further violating expected respect of police officers, and refusing their own Black violability. Treva B. Lindsey defines Black violability as “a construct that attempts to encapsulate both the lived and historical experiences of Black people with state-initiated and state-sanctioned violence” (“Let Me Blow Your Mind Hip Hop Feminist Futures in Theory and Praxis” 66). Thus, as the residents of Ferguson were confronting the police officers in the image, they were refusing to accept the ease with which state-

sanctioned violence was perpetrated against them; they were refusing to be expendable.

When Brown's body was left in the open on Canfield Drive for four hours, it "set the scene for what would become a combustible worldwide story of police tactics and race in America" (Bosman and Goldstein). How the body was handled sent a clear message that marked it as *property* rather than a *corpse*. Rather than covering the body with a sheet and preventing members of the surrounding community from seeing the body, the Ferguson police left Brown's body "in the open, allowing people to record it on their cellphones" (Ibid.). Eventually, the body was shielded "with a low, six-panel orange partition typically used for *car crashes*" (Ibid, emphasis mine). The use of partitions used for a car crash is intriguing in two ways.

First, there's an equivalency drawn between Brown and a car when a device used to shield the latter was used to shield the former; and further, these partitions are usually used to help keep road ways open while attending to and protecting the scene of the crime—to help try to re-establish the normalcy of the roads. In these moments, the police of Ferguson, Missouri, dehumanized Michael Brown. Rather than covering the body so that passers-by wouldn't be affected by it, Brown's body was left of display to be seen. Black bodies have often been used as examples of necropower; for instance, lynching victims were often left in trees and seen by other Black citizens in order to be a warning sign of what could happen if they acted outside of how they *ought* to (Ward). By dehumanizing Brown, the Ferguson Police were not simply being negligent with a body (or "evidence"), but they were denying the possibility of grieving the loss of Michael Brown.

Second, because the body had been in plain sight for so long before the partitions were used, a clear message of Black violability was sent to the onlookers of the scene—and those who saw images of the scene. The precarity of Black lives was illustrated by the lifeless body that was plain to see before being covered. Together, these two ways of approaching the delayed use of the partitions to cover Brown's body elucidate the tactics used to police raced bodies: These individuals are repeatedly marked and (re)presented as expendable through being treated as property or objects (e.g. slavery and the way female—especially non-white female—bodies are seen as objects) before and while also being told to continue about their lives as if nothing were wrong.

The affective confrontation of the individuals in Figure 7 is colored by their queer grief over being seen as expendable—a queer grief that is emblematic of the entire Black Lives Matter movement. In her analysis of the Movement for Black Lives, Lindsey writes, “Martin’s murder and Zimmerman’s subsequent acquittal energized a new cadre of people tenaciously committed to addressing racial injustice. ... Without this massive public outcry, it is quite possible an indictment may never have come” (“5 Years After His Death, Trayvon Martin Still Impacts the Future of #BlackLivesMatter”). Having seen the affective potential of refusing to accept the terms upon which Martin was murdered, the people of Ferguson (unwittingly?) mobilized the same affective refusal after the murder of Brown. The individuals in Figure 7 are expressing their queer grief over the killing of Brown, making it known they were not going to accept the killing of yet another Black male by authority figures.

Through their refusal to accept the lineage that marked Brown as an expendable

criminal, protestors expressed their queer grief. Some of the rhetorical refusals to accept the deaths of Black (and brown) people at the hands of law enforcement took the form of proclaiming, “Black lives matter;” prayers that the deaths of Brown, Martin, and others would affect positive change (Healy); “Hands Up, Don’t Shoot” (Williams); and, material destruction caused by the protestors. Through affirming that Black lives matter when the racist habitus of the United States has consistently acted contra to that assertion, the protestors bring attention to the terms upon which these losses occur to begin bringing about change. This queer grief was intensified after the investigation into Wilson’s handling of the incident concluded.

When the grand jury decided to not indict the officer responsible for the death, protests broke out in Ferguson and across the nation. As the protests began to grow larger and angrier, “an array of public officials, community leaders and clergy were deeply critical of one another as they sought to explain how protests over the grand jury’s decision not to indict the white police officer in the shooting had spun further out of control than the unrest that followed the death” (Davey and Fernandez). These protests and demonstrations that broke out across the United States are a mass mobilization of queer grief. A grief that refused to accept the grounds upon which Brown was killed. When Wilson’s grand jury testimony was released, Brown was portrayed as a “demon[ic]” aggressor rather than a helpless victim (225). Cries of “never allow[ing] ourselves to march under the banner of a false narrative on behalf of someone who would otherwise offend our sense of right and wrong” (Capehart). However, what those arguments fail to consider is the fact that the same laws that allowed Zimmerman’s

acquittal and Wilson's evasion of charges are enforced by a systemically racist government that marks what is "right" and "wrong." However, Brittney C. Cooper notes that those "who argue Brown should not be the *cause célèbre*" of the Black Lives Matter movement "miss[ ] a significant point ... No matter how Wilson and Brown confronted each other, ... In a matter of seconds, Brown was viewed expendable enough to shoot and kill." Although the protests animated by queer grief in Ferguson compelled a Department of Justice investigation into the policing practices of the Ferguson Police Department that found many constitutional violations in various handling of cases (Andrews et al.), that change is not only isolated to the small town of Ferguson. Further, there are still widespread extrajudicial killings of Americans of color. The queer grief of Black Lives Matter has spawned the movement, but there's still a very long way to go.

### **The Ties that Bind: Rhetorical Loss of Personhood**

Since both Black Lives Matter and ACT UP were founded in response to the necropolitical killings of Black and queer Americans, they rest on a shared notion of embodiment and precarity. Although the lack of attention to raced embodiment has been an issue to queer theory, queer studies scholars are beginning to become more attendant to the shared precarity of queer populations, populations of color, and queer of color populations. I assert that queer grief ties together the queer community and people of color; both of queers and people of color have been barred from observing what grief *ought* to be because marginalized populations *ought not* be grieved.

In her ACT UP Oral History Project interview, Ann Northrop regarded the

“cranky” and/or “angry” characterization of the members of ACT UP as being grounded in a double loss: the loss of life and the rhetorical loss of personhood. Specifically, Northrop says:

I have said, repeatedly—and I have this habit of quoting myself—I think that gay white men thought they had privilege in this country and were shocked to find out they didn’t, and that people in power were prepared to let them die. And when they figured that out, they got very angry about it—a lot of them. Some of them just slunk off into corners and accepted that, but a lot of them got really angry, and that’s what made ACT UP happen. It was the people who got angry about not having privilege.

Thus, from Northrop’s perspective the anger that was laced throughout ACT UP’s actions and philosophy was rooted in the white gay men’s refusal to accept that their personhood was as disposable as other minority populations targeted by necropolitical power. The queer grief they were experiencing stemmed from, as Northrop put it, the loss of their privilege, but that privilege is bound up in these men’s identities because the homophobic policies and citizens were literally willing to strip them of their lives.

While many of the activists who were interviewed for the Oral History Project mentioned their activism having been rooted in experiences of seeing Civil Rights movements or Anti-War protests, many of the male members of ACT UP were unaware of how their white skin and male-bodied privilege had shielded them from the worst effects of homophobia and from being aware of their own marginalization until the AIDS crisis. With this loss of privilege came an increased inability to be heard, to be rhetorically equipped to undermine and change the homophobia that was threatening to obliterate them. These men were grieving the *rhetorical loss of personhood*. I define a rhetorical loss of personhood as the loss of a quality conferred to an individual by the

society in which they live that allows them to act agentively and democratically in any given situation. When a person is seen as disposable, their capacity to affect change is (seemingly) lost. If the larger society a person lives in sees them as disposable, expendable, interchangeable, then the society can very easily look away from that person. The community becomes unaffected by that person. In the case of ACT UP, the white gay males of the organization mobilized their queer grief to in part resist this rhetorical loss. However, these men often couldn't think beyond their own selves. Northrop mentions that the women of ACT UP were more able to think intersectionally about the movement and how the oppression being faced was "about power versus lack of power, ... about class, ... about homophobia or race or sex. But, the gay white men there with HIV were there for their own personal survival, and out of their own anger at not having privilege" (14). The men she is focusing on were queerly grieving their own precarity while also coming to terms with the fact they were being scapegoated by the U.S. government the way that so many other populations have been for centuries.

The targets of that oppression and scapegoating are often Black Americans. Through the long lines of slavery, Jim and Jane Crow, and the prison system, Black Americans have long been told and retold their personhood is disposable and expendable. Within the same rhetorical lineage that deemed slaves property and later only three-fifths of a person, Trayvon Martin was called a thug, and Michael Brown was called a demon. When Black Americans are consistently being told they are *everything but* a person—a human being—it breeds and perpetuates a racist habitus that marks Black Americans as being expendable and unable to act. Rather than grieving the

rhetorical loss of their personhood, protestors of the Black Lives Matter are mobilizing the queer grief they've felt for centuries. Latching onto the publicity surrounding the Trayvon Martin case, Black Americans were able to expand the discursive space they created for themselves on Black Twitter into the mainstream consciousness. The queer grief utilized by Black Lives Matter relies on rhetoric of difference that creates or, in this case, further opens a discursive space. According to Lisa Flores, "rhetoric of difference includes repudiating mainstream discourse and espousing self- and group-created discourse. Through the rejection of the external and creation of the internal, marginalized groups establish themselves as different from stereotyped perceptions and different from dominant culture" (145). Black Twitter serves as a discursive space in which users like Garza, Tometi, and Cullors can rebuke the mainstream narratives and stereotypes of Black Americans while creating their own identities as individuals and a group. It's through a rhetoric of difference on Black Twitter that Black Americans have been able to regain a sense of their rhetorical personhood and exercise that personhood to enact social change. Within that space, the lives of Black Americans are valued and celebrated; and through that, the outcry of "Black Lives Matter" mobilized queer grief and was able to pierce the mainstream consciousness and pick up momentum. From a hashtag to a movement, Black Lives Matter deployed the queer grief of refusing to accept the terms upon which Black Americans were (and are) being eradicated by the military-industrial complex.

### **Activating Grief**



Many times, activism centers around the possibility and probability of a loss. That loss might be the death of individuals, such as the case studies explored above, or that loss might be the loss of rights and/or privilege(s), which Northrop pointed out in her interview. Either way, the loss that is experienced typically comes with terms and conditions placed on it by necropolitical ideologies such as homophobia and racism. When a loved one dies, we are only offered a handful of days off work; when a population marked as disposable is lost, we are supposed to turn a blind eye and accept what has been mandated by various policies and institutions. Queer grief is the agentic affect that allows individuals, groups, and populations to refuse the terms on which the loss occurred; queer grief supplies the potentiality for change. ACT UP was able to activate their queer grief through various disruptive demonstrations that made the larger United States population look at and see the gravity of the AIDS crisis. Likewise, Black Lives Matter (re)activated the queer grief of losing people of color to extrajudicial murder and brought national attention to an issue that was ignored and/or unknown beforehand. Both of these organizations used the losses of marginalized people to motivate social change.

### Conclusion: Grieving Writing

Throughout this thesis I have underscored the definition of affect as “the ability to affect and to be affected” (Stewart 1). While affect theorists across disciplines approach affect and its entanglements with feelings and emotion in different ways, the potentiality of affect remains at the core of these theorists’ investments in this theory. However, not all theorists are reflexive about *their own* entanglements with affect and the potential of that relationship. How does writing about affect impress upon the writer/theorist? How does writing about ugly/bad/negative feelings affect the writer? This thesis is fraught with negative feelings and their effects, but missing is my own entanglement with the theories I deploy throughout. In “Performing/Rhetorical Studies,” Charles E. Morris III insists on rhetorical scholars adopting the practice of reflexivity, which “is an unceasing process of self-engagement, deeply reading one’s multiple cultural, political, ideological *situatedness* and its implications, privileges, relations to others” that allows for a deeper understanding various positionalities, including our own, as well as adopting the criticality that rhetorical studies has long called for (“Performing/Rhetorical Studies” 105). This conclusion heeds both Morris’ call for rhetorical scholars to be reflexive as well as my own call for affect as method resting on a necessary reflexivity.

Unfolding as a “mystory” (Bowman and Bowman; Bowman), this chapter will explore my affective experience of writing so intimately about grief while also having to reconcile my own feelings and sentiments toward grief itself. Michael and Ruth Bowman explain Gregory Ulmer’s idea of the mystory as “a collage or assemblage of textual/experiential fragments” that “becomes an occasion for inventing new knowledge

of the self, rather than merely reproducing what is already known” (162). In using these fragments to invent or uncover new knowledge of the self, this chapter places an emphasis on the embodied and lived experience of a self—me—as it interacted with and was changed by the experience of having written this thesis. This chapter and its artifacts, then, become lived rather than textual—or perhaps lived through the textual—but performative writing, according to Della Pollack, “moves *with*, operates alongside, sometimes through, rather than above or beyond, the fluid, contingent, unpredictable, discontinuous rush of (performed) experience—and *against* the assumption the (scholarly) writing must or should do otherwise” (81). That is to say, the chapter will be framed “as a dynamic response to the extent to which writing and performance have failed each other by withdrawing—whether defensively or by pejorative attribution—into identification with either arcane or apparently self-evident means of knowledge production” to bridge the gap between these two analytics (writing and performance) (Pollack 79). I am putting these two analytics against one another in order to convey a fuller understanding of the potential to *affect* and *be affected* by affect (theory).

Two scholars cited in this project—Elspeth Probyn and Deborah Gould—elucidate their affective entanglements with their projects and serve as a springboard for this conclusion. In the conclusion to *Blush*, Elspeth Probyn explains the toll writing a book about shame took on her body, writing:

I felt the presence of something dreadfully pressing. Ah yes, the book. And then I retched. This kept happening as I pondered my case. There was no great stress in my life. I was on research leave far away from the pressures of my job, and all I had to do was to write, rewrite, and rewrite this book. I tried to ignore this little routine my body had set up. That didn't work; the

body insisted I pay attention. (Probyn 129)

Probyn's attention to how her body was affected by her research on affect underscores the *embodied, sensate, felt* nature of affect as well as the need for reflexivity in (affect) scholarship. Likewise, Deborah Gould notes how she was also affected by her research of ACT UP and the AIDS crisis, often finding herself "weeping uncontrollably, thoroughly undone. Or ... would find [her]self astonished, in jaw-dropping disbelief about the sheer number and unrelenting reiteration of deaths within the movement" (*Moving Politics* 6). This being-affected by her artifacts left Gould "in an affect-flooded stupor, transported to a temporally disjunctive state, experiencing, in a way for the first time, the horrors of a recent past that [she] had lived through but on some affective level had refused" (*Ibid.*). By underscoring the ability for artifacts to affect their critics, Probyn and Gould help to complicate the idea of queer grief. The expression of grief is only condoned by structured feelings when the griever is directly connected to the deceased in institutionally-recognized forms of relation (e.g. the deceased is a parent, child, family member); however, due to affect's indiscriminate nature, anyone can be affected by the loss of a person, even if there is no relation between them. My own experience with grief during the writing of this thesis—the grief I didn't feel but was expected to after my father's death and the grief I did feel but wasn't necessarily expected to feel during this project—further queers the notion of queer grief and brings together questions of affect, rhetorical studies, and reflexivity. This textual collage brings together journal entries from around the time of my father's death, reflections of being (un)affected by grief at different moments, and analysis of these entries and reflections through the concepts presented in

this thesis to show the potentiality of grief to affect those who encounter it.

I've always been attracted to the idea of journaling, but have never really been able to stick with a regular habit of writing in a journal. Whenever I (re)try keeping a consistent record of my life or feelings, I stall out because the events I'm experiencing don't feel worthy of memorialization.

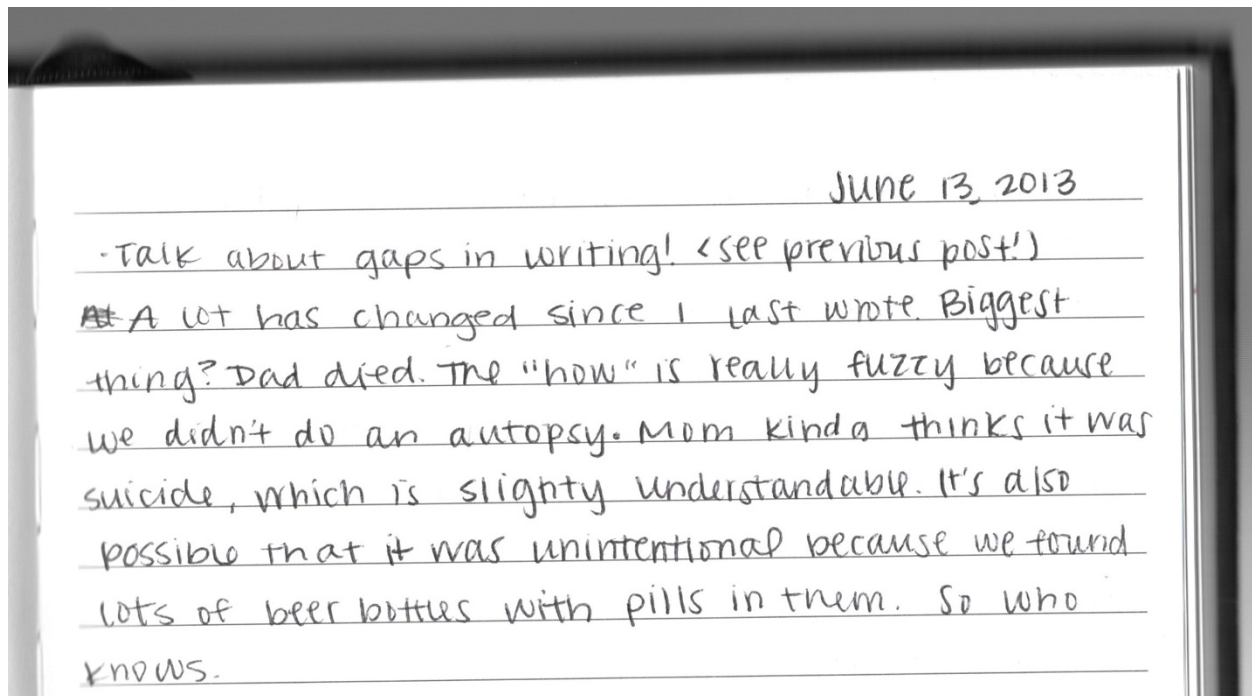


Figure 8: Scanned journal entry from author

*My dad died in the August of 2012, but I didn't write about it until almost a year later. I still remember my mom telling me about my dad's death. She and my grandmother had left our house early one morning for some errands, and I was going to spend the day catching up on a TV show I had missed for a few weeks. About an hour after they left, my mom and grandmother came back in the house, but my mom was crying.*

*"I have something to tell you," she said through her tears.*

*I didn't know what to say, or what she was going to say, so I said nothing.*

“Your dad died.”

*I remember thinking “that’s it?” I didn’t understand why she was so broken up about the death. Much of the strain on the relationship I had with my dad was due to how he treated my mom before, during, and after their divorce. Knowing how he’d treated her confused me as to why she was crying. I was also a bit stunned because rather than not know how to feel about his death, I felt nothing.*

“Well, he did it to himself,” I finally replied.

Unwittingly, I had marked my father’s life as ungrievable. In Chapter One, I trace two types of grief, good grief and queer grief. *Good grief* is the affective state that conforms to the structured feelings of grief to quickly recognize an event of loss as real and irreversible and quickly returns to living “the good life”; and, *queer grief* is a pathologized affect that destabilizes and/or escapes the dominant conceptions of what grief *ought* to be and how it *ought* to be observed in society. What was my *non-grieving*? Had I excelled at the structured feelings of grief and skipped the need to grieve completely? No, according to the “good life,” having a happy family is of the utmost importance (Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*), and the death of a family member shakes, destabilizes the family. At the very least, I should have mourned the fracture of the family. This is a (hetero)normativizing idea of family, though, and one that discounts the affective ties of queer relationality.

The model of *good grief* delineates that only close family members—children, parents, spouses, and siblings—are to be mourned, but because of queer individuals’ marginal position in Western culture, they are often denied the ability to mourn.

Whether the queer person has been ostracized by their family or they have a non-normative queer relation, queer individuals are often left without an avenue to mourn their loved ones. Further, the emotional habitus of queerness is often that of ambivalence (Gould, *Moving Politics*), and queers might not *want* to mourn those they are permitted to mourn.

*My father died at the start of my fourth year in college. It was and wasn't shocking. It was shocking in that he was "young"—fifty-three years old—and people told me after his death that he'd been in great health and spirits the days before. It wasn't shocking in that a family member or family friend had died every semester I'd been in college; I'd grown to expect a death with every new semester. It also wasn't shocking because he relapsed in his sobriety in the months leading up to his death. I hadn't spoken to my father in about two or three months before his death, and hadn't seen him in probably twice as long. I was rather unaffected by his death.*

*At another pivotal age, eighteen, I experienced another shocking death, that of a high school classmate. She was driving home one Friday night from a college course she took as part of her joint enrollment program. It's unclear why, but she swerved off the road and ran into a brick mailbox. That death affected me. I remember going to school the Monday after the crash, running into my Spanish and Yearbook teacher in the hallway before first period. I hadn't yet processed the reality of my friend's death, but for some reason seeing my teacher made it real and I started sobbing in the hallway, completely unfazed that I was in public. Later, when the school had a moment of silence for the student, I started crying again—not that I had completely stopped. I shared two or three classes with my friend, and in each of*

*those classes, grief counsellors came into the class to help us work through our sadness and pain. It was, frankly, bullshit. We wrote letters to her in one class and discussed how we were feeling in the other, but at the end of each class, the grief counsellors mentioned we would be feeling better sooner, that seeing the empty desk would get easier...*

In hindsight, the moment of silence and these in-class therapy sessions were ways to remind us of the structure of how to grieve our loss. We were supposed to get over this quickly. She was a friend or acquaintance, not a family member. We didn't need time off from school for bereavement; the school only needed the moment of silence to show our respect for her life, and those who knew her more intimately only needed a one-class reprieve from our normal routine to help reconcile the loss. This under rates the affective attachment of friendship and reifies the societal norms placed on what is considered a "family." Queer individuals are literally left without what is considered "family" due to the homophobia,

transphobia, and normativity of Western culture; and further, the families queers build for themselves are often not seen as being "family," leaving those affected by the loss unable to grieve in a societally-accepted manner. Eventually, I was still so



Figure 9: Picture of tattoos in memory of high school friend

affected by the loss of my friend from high school that I got two tattoos to commemorate the loss (Figure 9). Affect in general has the ability to move people to action—as Deborah Gould notes when investigating the affectivity of ACT UP—and grief is no



different.

Grief has the potential to undo people, to so completely impinge upon and/or disorder their lives. When someone observes *good grief*, they are grieving how they *ought* to, which involves working through the reality of the death. When a person's grief violates the structured feelings, they are typically engaging in "anxious and depressive avoidance strategies" (Boelen et al. 111). Depressive avoidance involves "Negative expectations [that] are assumed to be important ... especially those concerning the effects of engaging in potentially (e.g., 'Meeting friends will not make me feel better') and one's abilities to do so (e.g., 'I am unable to take up new responsibilities')" (Ibid. 116). Anxious avoidance "engage[s] in continuous rumination about [the griever's] own reaction or reasons why the loss occurred as a means to escape from having to admit the loss and the emotions linked with it" (Ibid. 115). These depressive and/or anxious strategies illustrate the potential of grief to disorder a person's world.

*My phone buzzed with a text message. "Everything ok?" it reads.*

*"Yeah. Just the regularly scheduled mental breakdown of second semester," I replied, wiping my face and eyes.*

*The cause of that panic attack wasn't exactly clear—the cause is rarely apparent in the moment—but it was the strongest one I'd had in a while. I was sitting in the graduate student office, working on this project, when suddenly I was seized with a familiar sense of dread, panic...vulnerability. I felt like I was underwater, unable to breathe or talk or move. I was uncomfortable being seen while having the panic attack, but I was glued to my chair. There was a flurry of excited activity as others were deciding on PhD programs or finishing*

*their theses, but I was on the outside of that joy, struggling to even remember how to breathe.*

*I've thought about very little other than grief for the better part of an academic school year, intensely so since January of 2017. The panic attack came at the start of April as I was nearing the perceived end of this project. Perhaps the panic attack was a way to avoid the reality of the emotional toll of writing a thesis about negative affects while also having a mental illness. Or perhaps I was wanting to avoid the impending loss of the community I was immersed in during the panic attack, as if I were pre-grieving.*

There are obvious forms of pathology surrounding certain affects in Western culture, such as the nervous alertness of anxiety disorders and the heavy disinterest of depression, but there are also less obvious forms. The affective display of anger and dissatisfaction that accompanies protest is also pathologized as being deviant or frivolous. In the current political climate of America, protestors are seen as being lazy and in need of a job or as not worthy of protection (Derespina; Campbell). All pathologized affects are marked as dangerous and unwelcome because “modern civic order is based on muted affect—that is, on the containment of emotionality, and especially negative emotions, to private life” because “emotional display[s] can become a mode of dissent” (Hariman and Lucaites 6). Thus, when activists choose to amplify and deploy their affective experience, they are using their emotional displays as the animating force behind their actions.

In Chapter Two, I used queer grief as a modality of analysis through which to (re)imagine ACT UP and Black Lives Matter and the social change they accomplish(ed).

This chapter asserts that by refusing to accept the death or loss of queer and Black individuals, these two organizations take up the rhetorical possibilities of queer grief. In refusing deaths on the terms of the hegemonic ideologies they faced (homophobic conservatism for ACT UP and racist vigilantism for Black Lives Matter), ACT UP and Black Lives Matter pointed out the necropolitical oppression they were facing. This necropower marked their lives as expendable and unmournable.

*I read through at least a thousand pages of the ACT UP Oral History Project Interview transcripts, most of which I read in one Saturday. I was captivated, struck, pricked. There was a sense of importance in the words, a gravity. Even though I didn't watch many of the videos—I need to see the words for them to connect—I could hear the precarity in each of the interviewees' voices. Often, I cried reading the transcripts, hurt by the atrocities and/or relieved to hear how people I didn't even know survived their fight with HIV/AIDS. I was equally moved by the Black Lives Matter movement, but in a different way. I have a clear memory of the deaths that spawned the Black Lives Matter movement. When searching for artifacts to put in this thesis, I could draw on my own memories of and feelings toward the events as well as on accounts from those involved in the movement. I cried remembering those killed, hurt by the atrocities. The possibility of betraying the interests of Black Lives Matter and ACT UP. Betraying those interests felt like, in some way, I would further the atrocities I was analyzing.*

Elspeth Probyn's notion of "writing shame" loomed over me throughout this project. Writing shame for Probyn is "a phrase [she] use[s] to capture both the affective, bodily feeling of betraying interest, and also about how we might envision writing shame

as part of an ethical practice” (130). I was ruminating “continually on the [possible] implications of [this] writing,” worried it didn’t quite push far enough, but also worried I wasn’t being true to the artifacts that had so deeply affected me (Ibid. 131). I was plagued by “visceral reminder[s] to be true to interest, to be honest about why or how certain things are of interest” (Ibid.).

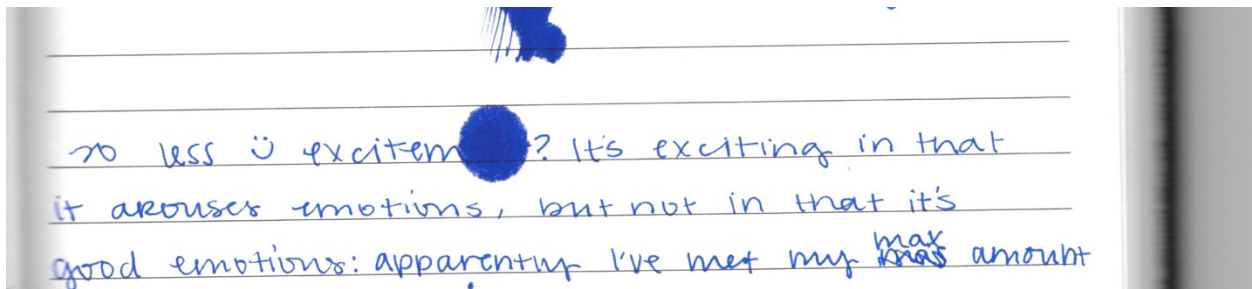


Figure 10: Journal entry from March 27, 2015

*“Were you having a bad dream?” my friend asks. Lately, she sleeps most nights on an air mattress next to my bed after we’ve held each other accountable to doing work late into the night.*

*“Um...I don’t know. Why?” I don’t tend to remember my dreams, or if I do, it’s fleeting memories only.*

*“You were kicking and sweating.”*

*I feel the clamminess of my pillow as she points it out. I’m clammy all over. I push the covers off—at least what bits of them I haven’t kicked off in my sleep—and am immediately shivering from the air meeting the night sweat still on my clothes. It hadn’t been the first (and wasn’t the last) time I woke up sweaty and tense. I can’t place the tension in my body—it feels like it could be from clenching my jaw or possibly from frowning and furrowing my brow all night. I might also be kicking the wall each night as my mattress is about three inches askew in the bed frame each morning. I’ve always had a proclivity for*

*“bottling my feelings up” as my mom would say. Maybe I’m doing that with the emotions of this thesis as well. Bottling them up, and they’re coming out at night; I don’t often share the parts of this thesis with other people. The material and topic seems to turn people off, turn people away.*

*“What is your thesis about?” most people ask.*

*“I’m writing about grief and how it influences social movements.”*

*“Oh...”*

*People don’t want to hear about grief. Or maybe when they hear the word they’re reminded of their own grief. It manifests in little things: other grad students sit across the room from me when we’re writing; projects of a lighter nature get questions and follow-ups whereas my project gets a cursory remark—maybe. I feel it too, though. I typically have to battle myself to write even a couple sentences. I prefer to write in what I’ve dubbed my blanket cocoon, surrounded by pillows. What am I trying to protect myself from?*

Writing shame was impressing upon me so much that I began grieving writing. Rather than just that visceral reminder Probyn elucidates, I was also feeling the loss of the writing to be true to the interests I was following. The possibility of betraying the interests of the lives lost to the AIDS crisis, the interests of the lives lost to extrajudicial murders of Black Americans, felt greater than the possibility of living up to that interest. I was feeling “the painful effects of sadness, guilt, shame, helplessness, or hopelessness” (Engel 18) as I was anticipating the imagined loss of my own interests in this project. My being-affected by my artifacts and materials—the gravity of the attachment I felt to the artifacts and materials—made writing them seem inadequate in some way. Della

Pollack's observation that "writing and performance have failed each other by withdrawing—whether defensively or by pejorative attribution" ran through my grief over writing (81). Being affected became a visceral litmus test for my writing's capacity to affect. That is to say, I consistently compared how my artifacts pricked me with how I felt my writing was going to pique other people's interest; I wanted to accurately convey my impressions of the material. I felt the structures of a capitalist work ethic getting under my skin, though. In brushing up against the idea of what being productive was or *ought* to be, I was learning, feeling, sensing how I was failing to do what I *ought* to. Grieving my writing meant that I *ought* to accept the possibility of failing the interests of my materials—of ACT UP and Black Lives Matter—in order to be productive and make progress on the project. However, I want(ed) to queerly grieve this project.

In framing this conclusion as a mystory, I wanted to gesture toward the next lives of queer grief, structured feelings, and affect as method. Beyond desiring to attend to scholars' affective entanglements with their artifacts and projects, I am also interested in the performative possibilities of grief. In *Perform or Else*, John McKenzie writes a "speculative forecast" that "performance will be to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries what discipline was to the eighteenth and nineteenth, that is, an onto-historical formation of power and knowledge" (18). In this "onto-historical formation of power and knowledge," per McKenzie, scholarship will shift from looking at how power is divided and enacted through discipline (as the works of Foucault, Deluze, and others have done) and instead turn to the monitoring and evaluation of performances of various kinds. Through looking at the performances of grief and how they are monitored, another facet

of the epistemological power of structured feelings to teach the expected experience and expression of affective states can be revealed. That is to say, rather than *only* relying on the institutionalized policies that discipline the expressions of grief (such as bereavement leave allowances), grief will instead be monitored by those close to a griever to ensure they are staying in line with the structured feelings of grief (such as the friend urging a widow[er] to begin dating again shortly after the death of a spouse) as well as disciplined through institutionalized policies. Further, recent work on the performative aspects of social protest could complicate the idea of how affect can act as a rallying point for social movements. At the heart of queerness, grief, and performance is risk, a risk of missing the mark or coming undone or being excessive, but inherent in risk is also its potential. Queerness and activism are often predicated by death or loss: the loss of futurity, the loss of rights, the loss of lives, etc. However, because death impinges upon the normalcy of our lives, it has the ability to affect us, to move us to action. When activists are performing queer grief, they are exceeding the confines of what they *ought* to do, and it opens the doors for social change.

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